

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

**Permanent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/100880>

**Copyright and reuse:**

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

***MONTAILLOU AND THE HISTORY OF POSSIBILITIES***



Daniel Fairbrother

*Title:* **Montaillou and the History of Possibilities**

*Author:* Daniel Fairbrother

*Supervisors:* Charles Turner and Alex Smith

*This thesis is submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.*

Warwick University, Department of Sociology.

*Submitted:* September 2017.

*Declaration:* I, Daniel Fairbrother, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. The thesis has not been submitted for examination at another university.

## ***CONTENTS***

<b>Contents</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>List of illustrations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	
1. Ranke with some Hegel	12
2. Weber I	16
3. Durkheim	20
4. Weber II	22
5. Weber III	24
6. Possibilities in <i>Montaillou</i>	28
7. Some more Hegel	31
<b>II. <i>Montaillou</i>: Puzzles and Commentaries</b>	
8. Systems: A little community	37
9. Judgements: The name of a horse	47
10. Post- <i>Montaillou</i>	55
11. Pre- <i>Montaillou</i>	67
12. <i>Montaillou</i>	75
13. Pierre Clergue	78
14. Pierre Maury	89

<b>III.</b>	<b>Analysis of Sociological Concepts and Historical Judgements</b>	
15.	Visible and invisible	93
16.	Elster: Possibilities in sociological explanations	98
17.	Stinchcombe: Possibilities in sociological concepts	122
18.	Hawthorn: Possibilities in historical understanding	128
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Analysis of Actions in Historical Representations</b>	
19.	Modality, Monadology, and Montaillou	145
20.	Event-Condition Duality in Medieval Actions	174
21.	Historical Action-Sentences	183
22.	Possibilities in a Theory of Action	195
<b>V.</b>	<b><i>Montaillou</i>: Concluding Commentaries</b>	
23.	The shepherd's destiny	
	i. Foresight and fatalism	226
	ii. Sides, wholes, conditions, and coordinates	233
24.	The priest's dominium	
	i. The Rape of Grazide Rives	237
	ii. Mass, <i>domus</i> , chateau, and <i>cabanes</i>	249
	iii. Concluding remarks	255
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>263</b>

## ***LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS***

Title page: 'Depiction of an iconostasis'; Palekh (Russia), c.1800; egg tempura on wood, 72 × 60 cm; *Recklinghausen, Ikonen-Museum*; reproduced from Haustein-Bartsch 2008: 81.

*Figure 1.* Page 5: Map: 'The Lands of Occitan Catharism'; reproduced from Weiss 2000: xv.

*Figure 2.* Page 78: Montailou castle with snowy terraces; photograph by Madeleine LeRoy Ladurie; reproduced from LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 8.

*Figure 3.* Page 82: Map: 'Montailou, 1300-1309'; reproduced from Weiss 2000: xviii-xix.

*Figure 4.* Page 129: *Maestà*, altarpiece (main panel); Siena (Italy), 1308; tempura on poplar; Cathedrale di Siena; reproduced from Carli 1998: 24-5.

*Figure 5.* Page 131: *Maestà*, altarpiece (reverse compartments); Siena (Italy), 1308; tempura on poplar; Cathedrale di Siena; reproduced from Carli 1998: 28-9.

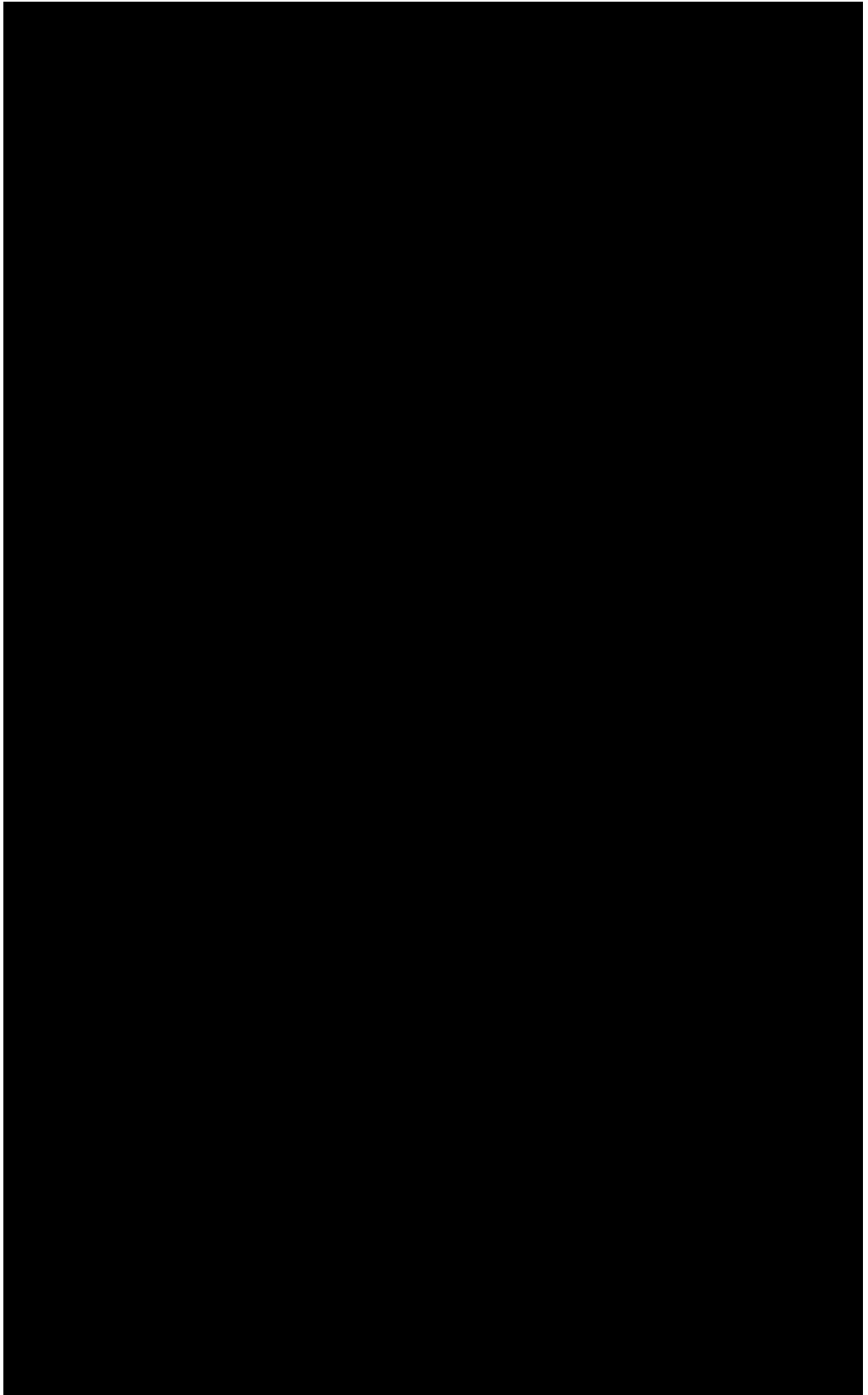
*Figure 6.* Page 183: Still from *The Seventh Seal* / *Det sjunde inseglet*, Ingmar Bergman (dir.), 1957; courtesy of Janus Films; *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*; reproduced from <https://www.sfmoma.org/event/seventh-seal/>. Accessed: 03/08/2017

*Figure 7.* Page 246: Illustration showing a witch giving the anal kiss to Satan; in Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum*. Milan (Italy), 1626; woodcut; reproduced from Roper 2004: 92.

*Figure 8.* Page 262: 'The saints and the feasts of the church calender'; Moscow (Russia), c.1500-1550; egg tempura on wood, 157.9 × 90.5 cm; *Recklinghausen, Ikonen-Museum*; reproduced from Haustein-Bartsch 2008: 57.

## ***ABSTRACT***

This thesis develops a reading of *Montaillou, un village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (1975) by Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie in parallel with a theory of possibilities in history. It is argued that possibilities are fundamentally involved in the semantics of sociological concepts, in the nature of historical judgements, and in the way actions feature in historiography. The thesis addresses a variety of literature in historiography, sociological theory, the philosophy of social science, and the philosophy of history. The thesis is split into a Preface and 5 parts containing between them 24 chapters of varying lengths. The Preface defines the topic in relation to the work of Max Weber. Part 1 is the Introduction, and approaches the topic of possibilities in history through classical texts in sociology and the philosophy of history. Part 2 is an extended commentary on *Montaillou* and raises puzzles about how it works as a text. Part 3 analyses sociological concepts and historical judgements in terms of possibilities. Part 4 analyses action in history in terms of possibilities. Part 5 brings the theoretical apparatus developed in parts 3 and 4 back to *Montaillou* to offer commentaries which solve the puzzles raised in part 2. The strategy of the thesis is to grasp the role of possibilities in history by giving equal weight to theoretical analysis and historiographical commentary.





## ***PREFACE***

### *What this thesis is about*

Here I explore just one idea and its consequences: history is about situations characterised by varied but limited possibilities for action. Not only can one understand the contribution of sociological concepts better by treating them as summaries of historically specific possibilities, a characteristically *historical* way of analysing actions can be transacted in complementary terms. This continuity gives a specific sense to Max Weber's idea that sociological concepts are idealisations which get their real meaning in relation to action: both can be placed on a more general chessboard of possibilities determined by historically specific conditions. Yet history is not a game: there are no externally imposed rules, and the range of possible moves at any given time and place is determined by the interaction of a complex set of shifting conditions. To act, for instance, is at once to respond to historical conditions as one finds them *and* to extend the set of conditions under which oneself and others will have to act next.<sup>1</sup> My preoccupation here is with articulating how we talk about the contextual limits of such possibilities and how this sort of talk features in historiography.

Weber sometimes wrote about the importance of possibilities in history. He disputed with Karl Hampe (a medievalist contemporary) that 'history knows no possibilities'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Weber never built this into a fundamental account of history or sociology because his main concern was with a particular sort of 'adequate' *causal* explanation.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes he hints at something grander. Once he writes that 'every line of every historical account – indeed, every collection of archival material and documents

---

<sup>1</sup> This is something I explore in detail in part IV.

<sup>2</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 174

<sup>3</sup> See below.

destined for publication – contains ‘judgements of possibility’’.<sup>4</sup> Here Weber seems to be suggesting that possibilities constitute an entire dimension of historical knowledge, and that Hampe could not be more wrong.<sup>5</sup> The trouble – what has troubled me here – is saying *why* and showing *how*, and showing that this dimension is significant. Weber’s better-developed thoughts about possibilities cast them merely as forming the contrast-class in adequate causal explanations: what actually happens is explained by showing why *it* happened and not something else. Surely this is true; but it is also a very narrow concern. I have been guided here by the potential for a more ambitious and foundational theory which – perhaps – lay just a quantum out of Weber’s ken.

However, such a theory is more than I can offer. I have chosen instead to focus on some of its potential basic elements (sociological concepts, historical judgements, and historical actions) in so far as they can be shown to affect our understanding of a single work of Annales School medieval history: *Montaillou, un village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (1975).<sup>6</sup> French medieval historians like Bloch in *Société féodale* (1939/40) took early notice of social science as a toolbox for historical work.<sup>7</sup> In *Montaillou*, LeRoy Ladurie took this tradition at its word and tried to turn medieval history into ethnography. As I explain below, he read the inquisitorial registers of Jacques Fournier like field notes. Issues abound, of course, some of which I discuss below; but the main thing for my purposes is that LeRoy Ladurie provides the theorist with a fascinating puzzle about what exactly of substance lies beneath his – for the time – idiosyncratic annual of little anecdotes, short tales, character sketches, summary political and religious history, and social scientific analyses.<sup>8</sup> There is no obvious plot, and all of

---

<sup>4</sup> Weber 2012: 82

<sup>5</sup> I offer a more precise way to think about possibilities as a ‘dimension’ in IV.

<sup>6</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975. All quotations below are my translations unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>7</sup> Bloch 1939/40

<sup>8</sup> For ‘annual’, cf. Bennett 2005: ix.

these things seem just to be crammed in together as if, together, they add up to something.

What is that, and why bother? My short answer is that all the components of *Montaillou* are attempts to say something about the historical situation of the village in the late 1200s and early 1300s, and that consequently each component adds something about the possibilities for action – for living – which were characteristic of the time in the place. There are no overall causal claims in *Montaillou* and so there seems little purpose and even less interest in applying Weber's narrower ideas about possibilities and adequate causation. Instead, I have pursued his grander thought that possibilities in history constitute a ubiquitous dimension manifesting in different ways through different parts of a text. I have also tried to show that, faced with the details of *Montaillou*, revealing this dimension has substantive and interesting consequences. The text can teach us about the theory, and the theory can teach us about the text.

To make sure that this virtuous circle is not dominated by one pole, I have organised this thesis to account for a variety of different ways of discussing history: detailed historiographical commentary *and* abstract theoretical analysis. At the beginning and end, I offer commentaries on *Montaillou*. The introductory commentaries (part II) introduce the content of LeRoy Ladurie's text, some existing critical responses to it, and encourage the reader to approach *Montaillou* from an angle which should allow them to see how the issue of possibilities might arise while reading it. (I call the twenty-four continuously numbered sections 'chapters', though they vary considerably in length.) I try not to stamp my theme on the text though, and the idea is to give the text itself something like its due before I subject it to the theoretical rack. The concluding commentaries (V) pick up some of the same themes and introduce yet more passages from the text. Even here, however, I have tried not to impose my theme, but rather to show that the theoretical considerations I raise in the middle of the thesis can illuminate

aspects of *Montaillou* as organic parts of my commentary. I have not achieved this perfectly, by any means, because at times I have needed to rely on a clunky theoretical apparatus of diagrams to pin down exactly what I mean to say about possibilities. I hope, in fact, to have made a benefit of this imperfection in so far as the blemishes (the diagrams) show my theory at work rather starkly.

Sandwiched between the commentaries, the middle sections of the thesis comprise a fairly non-linear battery of arguments and discussions approaching the topic of possibilities from different but complementary angles. This middle is split into two parts (III and IV). In the first of these, I focus on how possibilities are involved in sociological concepts and historical judgements. In the second, I focus on historical actions in relation to possibilities: how we imagine them when they are represented within works of history, how we can analyse them theoretically in a way that prepares them to link into sociological concepts, and how – perhaps – placing actions in a historical dimension of possibilities requires we explain them in a special way. This core sandwich-structure of the thesis is preceded by an attempt in part I (the substantive Introduction beyond this preface) to help the reader approach the general idea of historically specific possibilities, quite gradually, before thinking about the whirl of detail which is *Montaillou*. I do this by discussing possibilities in relation to some classical sociology and philosophy of history: Ranke, Durkheim, Weber, and Hegel. Marx appears but briefly. So much for what I *have* done, but first a note on what I have *not* attempted.

*What this thesis is not about*

Wittgenstein wrote that:

The insidious thing about the causal point of view is that it leads us to say: “Of course, it had to happen *like that*.” Whereas we ought to think: it may have happened *like that* – and also in many other ways.<sup>9</sup>

E.g. there is nothing more stupid than the chatter about cause and effect in history books; nothing is more wrong-headed, more half-baked. – But what hope could anyone have of putting a stop to it just by *saying* that? (It would be like trying to change the way women and men dress by talking.)<sup>10</sup>

As soon as one mentions possibilities and history in the same breath, it is assumed one is either talking about counterfactual analyses of historical causation (as in Weber), or so-called ‘counterfactual history’ itself. Of course, using some of the same words in a description of two things does not imply a real commonality: calling two things ‘beautiful’ in no way implies their resemblance. This thesis is certainly not about counterfactual history and I do not mention its literature beyond this footnote<sup>11</sup> because it would be an unwelcome distraction from what I actually want to articulate. Geoffrey Hawthorn’s book *Plausible Worlds* (1991) – which led me to this topic and which I discuss below – often gets dragged into the counterfactual history category. As I

---

<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein 1980 [1940]:37

<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein 1980 [1947]: 62

<sup>11</sup> I note some recent discussions: see Ferguson 2011 for a work of explicitly counterfactual history and Schmid 2009, Lebow 2009 and Talbot 2009 for related theoretical discussion. Shiel 2009 argues that counterfactuals are a useful instrument for thinking about cultural influence in history, but the model is still restricted to causal or quasi-causal explanations. In *Altered Pasts* (2014), Evans has surveyed the history of the counterfactualist debate while limiting – on unclear grounds – the legitimacy of counterfactuals to what historical actors actually imagined was possible; see Tucker 2016, Maar, Ben-Menahem 2016, Rosenfeld 2016, Woolf 2016, Sunstein 2016, and Nolan 2016 for responses. Evans 2016 replies. Unlike Hampe, Evans accepts a limited role for possibilities in history, but his basic position is that there are too many of them to be useful to the historian. Yet, as I suggest for his engagement with Hawthorn (see note 12), Evans seems to employ the erudite survey method for hiding unsupported assumptions. Every line of every page of *Altered Pasts* hides a range of alternative positions.

explain later, anyone actually *reading* Hawthorn's book will realise that he was trying to demonstrate the inherent importance of possibilities in history, not inventing a new method or genre. My uncomplicated reason for interpreting Hawthorn in this way is that it is what he said.<sup>12</sup>

Counterfactual analyses of historical causation are a *little* closer to home, but they are not my topic either: I am not discussing causation, so I cannot be discussing counterfactual analyses of it. Nevertheless, at some places in the text the issue may *seem* so close that I have tried to indicate the specific distance between it and what I am actually talking about. As I have said, part IV is devoted to the topic of action. A huge amount has been written about what Ruben calls the 'Causal Theory of Action', and I discuss at length Ruben's own attempt to provide an alternative in *Action and Its Explanation* (2003). Ruben argues in detail against the causalist approach in two full chapters, but this is not my task here.<sup>13</sup> Instead, I think the irrelevance of the causalist approach follows from the more fundamental account of *historical* action which I provide. I argue for this directly in part IV by offering an analysis of what I call 'historical action-sentences'. These bear some resemblance to Arthur Danto's 'narrative sentences' from *Analytical Philosophy of History*.<sup>14</sup> Rather than trying to show like Ruben that all causalist accounts fail, I only try to show that my account of possibilities in history – in *Montaillou* – is neutral with regard to the availability of causal explanations for actions in history. Although I aim thusly to be both catholic and agnostic about such things, causation is simply a separate issue. Unlike Wittgenstein, who seemed to despair of calmly worded persuasion, I have an argument for this.

---

<sup>12</sup> See Hawthorn 1991: chp.1 and below. Evans 2014: 154 mentions Hawthorn, but he pays no attention to Hawthorn's first and final chapters where Hawthorn makes clear he is not a counterfactualist. It is almost as if Evans were to have missed some documentation and assumed Churchill was German.

<sup>13</sup> Ruben 2003: chps. 3 & 4; for more recent surveys and discussions, see Sandis & D'Oro 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See Danto 1986 and below.

## ***PART ONE: INTRODUCTION***

### **1. Ranke with some Hegel**

History is about more than facts. We will ask: how much more? By turns, Leopold von Ranke denied history anything but the facts *and* hinted at their significance on quite another plane. In a short essay called simply ‘Ranke’ reprinted in *Europe: Grandeur and Decline*, AJP Taylor quoted Ranke’s own writings three times. Third and last was a comment about a speech by Frederick William IV. This is the King of Prussia mentioned by Weber (at a remove, through Meyer) in his preparation for a treatment of ‘objective possibility’.<sup>15</sup> The content of Ranke’s comment is simply laudatory, though there is some interest in his finding ‘great historical truth’ in Frederick’s speech. One can read into it Ranke’s Hegelianism, his concatenation of history and truth as respectively the ocean and cargo of the ship of state; but this is not really visible in Taylor’s quotation.<sup>16</sup>

Before Frederick’s speech – for Taylor – came part of a letter from Ranke to his brother Heinrich:

My basic thought is not to accept either one theory or another, not even the one which lies between them; but to recognize the facts, to master them and display them. The true teaching is in the recognition of events.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Weber 2012 [1906], see below.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor 1967: 116; cf. Ranke 2011 [c.1830]: 6-7; compare Hegel 1991 [1821].

<sup>17</sup> Taylor 1967: 114

This reflects the Ranke most people will imbibe from the air before they read him: the purveyor of *facts* and history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, ‘as it really was’.<sup>18</sup> In reality, this is just one famous phrase from one preface to one of Ranke’s works of 1824: the *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Peoples*. ‘Facts were’ Ranke’s ‘guiding star’, Taylor says in connection with the letter.<sup>19</sup> However, the same letter reveals a chink in the factualist Ranke. Engaging the facts requires three further processes beyond their mere recognition – recognition, mastery and display. Perhaps in isolation these can be written-off as the activities of a fact-collector, but they begin to attest, rather vaguely, to the historian’s broader responsibilities.

Next Taylor finds Ranke ‘forty years later’ in 1873 when ‘facts had become even more sacred’.<sup>20</sup> But the passage he adduces – much longer and perhaps therefore more significant than the other two – raises the question of whether the increased *sacredness* of facts might not actually transform them:

The historian exists in order to understand the sense of an epoch in and for itself and to make it understood by others. He must keep his eye with all impartiality only on the subject itself and on nothing else. Through everything runs the divine order of things, which certainly cannot be precisely displayed, but is to be felt all the same. The significant individuals have their place in the divine order, which is identical with the succession of epochs; this is how the historian must comprehend them. The historical method, which seeks only the genuine and the true, thus comes into direct contact with the highest questions of the human race.<sup>21</sup>

It is *through* facts, then, that history is to make contact with an order of epochs which, while it cannot be precisely displayed, can be felt. Something in this vague super-

---

<sup>18</sup> Ranke 2011 [1824]: 86

<sup>19</sup> Taylor 1967: 114

<sup>20</sup> Taylor 1967: 114

<sup>21</sup> Taylor 1967: 114



existence of facts is to put history, and perhaps the historian himself, in contact with the ‘highest’ questions of the human race. To grasp an epoch is to recognize its historical ‘idea’, a philosophic summation of the particulars which history is otherwise anxious to preserve in detail.<sup>22</sup> Here Ranke’s Hegelianism is clear, even if its meaning is not, or not entirely. For example, Hegel sometimes treats an aesthetic form as the expression of what Ranke would later call the ‘idea’ of an epoch:

Consequently the content and form of epic proper is the entire world-spirit presented in its self-objectifying manifestation of a national spirit presented in its self-objectifying shape as an actual event. This whole comprises both the religious consciousness, springing from all the depths of the human spirit, and also concrete existence, human needs and means for their satisfaction; and epic animates [recall that the Greek for ‘spirit’ is *anima*] this whole by developing it in close contact with individuals, because what is universal and substantive enters poetry only as the living presence of the spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps this sounds more precise than Ranke because it elucidates a specific form (epic) and analyses ‘concrete existence’ into ‘human needs and means’. What Hegel says gives us a sense, lacking in Ranke’s generalities, of which sorts of facts manifest the essence of an epoch; but it does not obviously provide us with a clearer link between facts and ‘spirit’ or the ‘idea’, which both Hegel and Ranke assume forms a *whole* (or ‘totality’<sup>24</sup>) comprising nations. Like Hegel before him, Ranke put his faith in the progress of monotheism/Christianity through history, commenting in his *Universal History* of 1880 that:

No materials for a history of the human race could have been found in the unbroken continuity of a national nature worship. The first solid foundation for this is laid in the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ranke 2011 [c.1830]: 15

<sup>23</sup> Hegel 1975 [1835]: 1044

<sup>24</sup> Ranke 2011 [c.1830]: 15

revolt against nature worship – in other words, in monotheism. On this principle is based a civil society which is alien to every abuse of power.<sup>25</sup>

The divine order and the succession of epochs are thus equated. It is the capacity of monotheism to draw nations into a common humanity which enables ‘universal history’. So, the epoch of monotheism is at least partly characterized here by Ranke as a situation characterized by *possibilities*: monotheism is what enables the spirit which makes a particular sort of human self-conception possible. Universal history as a form is thus just as reliant itself on historical conditions as what Hegel calls ‘epic proper’. Later in the lectures on fine art, Hegel elucidates this: ‘[t]he state of human life most suitable as the background of an epic is that in which it exists for individuals *already* as a present reality but which remains most closely connected with them by the tie of a common primitive life.’<sup>26</sup> The epic community must, while its rules remain binding, nevertheless leave individuals unencumbered so they might become heroes (or follow them): heroes in epics have to be free from the state and civil society, having an unformalized but communal ‘sense of justice’ underpinning the greatness of their actions.<sup>27</sup> ‘For example, in the Iliad Agamemnon is the King of Kings, the other Princes are under his sceptre, but his position as overlord does not become the dry connection of command and obedience’: ‘[h]e must take counsel with them, and if they are dissatisfied they stay away from the fight as Achilles did.’<sup>28</sup> For Ranke, the succession of such epochs was a matter of the ‘divine order’. Taylor suggests that it was with such vague cosmic suspicions that ‘Ranke escaped the problems of intellectual [i.e. earthly, political] integrity’.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ranke 1884 [1880]: 28

<sup>26</sup> Hegel 1975 [1835]: 1051

<sup>27</sup> Hegel 1975 [1835]: 1052

<sup>28</sup> Hegel 1975 [1835]: 1053. Here, some decades earlier, we find the theme of transition ‘from status to contract’ of Henry Maine’s *Ancient Law*; 1905 [1861].

<sup>29</sup> Taylor 1967: 116

Here at this early stage we will leave Ranke aside.<sup>30</sup> We learn nothing from shunting our confusions up to the ‘divine order’. Ranke has nothing direct to teach us about a substantive or positive role for possibilities in history. He is not, however, without his lessons: he chides Fichte’s aspiring to ‘deduce the phenomena which are possible in experience from the unity of [a] presupposed concept’, to be ‘able *a priori* to describe all of time and all its possible epochs *a priori*’.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, I will be searching for a more this-worldly and truly historical conception of possibilities than Ranke says Fichte offers, yet one which might nevertheless retain what Ranke and Hegel thought of as the central ‘ideal’ or ‘spiritual’ object of interest for history.<sup>32</sup> I shall try to show that possibilities play a more central role in our grasp of history than is usually recognized, and that possibilities are the side-doors through which sociology makes its contributions to historiography. Later, we will investigate the place of descriptions of individual actions and characteristically sociological concepts in a single work of social history: *Montaillou*. But first we need to grasp more fully the challenge of placing possibilities at the centre of a conception of history.

## 2. Weber I: Ideal types

Could Max Weber be more helpful than Ranke? One finds in a note of his from 1902 or 1903 what could be a direct scolding of Ranke in his equation of facts and divine order:

---

<sup>30</sup> For Ranke on the nature of history, without Taylor, see Ranke 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Ranke 2011 [c.1830]: 9

<sup>32</sup> Hegel’s logical works contain significant discussions of the nature of what he calls ‘real possibility’ – specific possibilities given particular realities; see Hegel 2008 [1831]: 155ff and Hegel 2010 [1812-1816]: 478ff. See below.

To elevate the historical *method* into a historical *world view* is to commit the same error as that represented by the ‘world view of natural science’. One should not become a slave to one’s method and one’s concepts.<sup>33</sup>

Weber’s own interpretative method is different to Ranke’s in two ways. Although elsewhere Weber reports with his tongue in his cheek that ‘Ranke “divined” the past’, there is a sense in which he rejects only Ranke’s vagueness.<sup>34</sup> He excises any appeal to a vague ‘divine order’. Yet, in doing so, he does not just leave us with Ranke’s ‘facts’. Meaning itself has to be brought down to earth, not simply allowed to dissipate from the atmosphere now there is no firmament to rely upon above our heads. This leaves Weber grappling with the lack of both a single ‘divine order’ or an ‘absolute polytheism’ in so far as the locus of values is now to be placed in persons leading singular lives, not deferred to a pantheon of gods preferred by a given historian.<sup>35</sup>

Weber’s struggle with this problem is manifest partly in his method of ideal types.<sup>36</sup> Ideal types are theoretical constructions of artificial rationality which can be used to investigate complex and divergent empirical phenomena. In Weber’s discussion in *Economy and Society*, ideal types contain an explicitly counterfactual element, and thus at least a nugatory role for possibilities in sociological interpretations: in economic theory, they are ‘unrealistic or abstract in that they always ask what course of action *would* take place *if* it were purely rational and oriented to economic ends alone’.<sup>37</sup> Actual behaviour can then be accounted for against the background of this ideal: Weber suggests that in the case of the Prussian War of 1866 ‘misinformation, strategical errors,

---

<sup>33</sup> Weber 2012 [c.1902-3]: 415. The editors of this edition of Weber’s methodological writings explain the uncertain date at Weber 2012: 411. I have removed some of their editorial apparatus from this note for the sake of visual clarity.

<sup>34</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 176

<sup>35</sup> Weber 2012 [1913, expanded 1917]: 314

<sup>36</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 19-22

<sup>37</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 21

logical fallacies, personal temperament, or considerations outside the realm of strategy' will show up as 'observed deviations'.<sup>38</sup>

In this respect, ideal types are, in one sense, bound to fail when they meet reality; they are ideal where reality is infinitely confusing, complex, and mixed; but before they fail they help us approach historical reality on a bearing which at least *begins* precisely.

Jospeh Conrad describes the equivalent 'technical' moment when putting to sea:

[A]s long as the coast she was about to leave remained in sight, a southern going ship of yesterday had not in the sailor's sense begun the enterprise of a passage. The taking of Departure, if not the last sight of the land, is, perhaps, the last professional recognition of the land on the part of the sailor. It is the technical, as distinguished from the sentimental, "good bye".<sup>39</sup>

Just as Conrad has Departure as a *technical* moment in a sea-voyage, so Weber's ideal types borrow as an instrument an idealized rationality to cope with a history of extraordinary and shifting complexity. Regardless of the analysis we can bring to bear, 'the number of individual events still remains infinite' – as he quotes Meyer's *Theory and Method*, approvingly.<sup>40</sup> Part of the utility of ideal types is to give definition to this infinity. Our consciousness of their heuristic status reminds us not to suppose we have 'mastered' the ocean of facts, as Ranke might have put it.

In Kant (whose thought I shall have to gloss over all too quickly here), the transcendental deduction was supposed to reveal the limit of reason, from the inside, in

---

<sup>38</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 21. One finds a nearly identical theory of war in von Clausewitz' *On War* nearly a century earlier than Weber's. Beginning in theory with a rationally extreme vision of the logic of conflicts fought for absolute victory, what von Clausewitz calls 'modification in the reality' which determines multiple, extended, and limited strategies in view of 'reciprocal action' between enemies; von Clausewitz 1997 [1832] 9 *et passim*.

<sup>39</sup> Conrad 1926 [1906]: 2

<sup>40</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 150

terms of its *conditions*.<sup>41</sup> Transcendental conditions, such as categories of thought (time and space, for instance<sup>42</sup>), make rational thought possible. This making-possible is what the word ‘transcendental’ means in this context, even if it retains more than a hint of the divine order.<sup>43</sup> Kant’s move, though its theological implications have remained unclear, provides a way to think of higher-level media of explanation – laws, above all – as requiring something less than revelation from the worldly person who wishes to explain aspects of the world rationally.<sup>44</sup> This may appear important for explanations of phenomena which cannot in any straightforward sense be considered *natural*, like societies. For all that Durkheim turned to Kant’s philosophy for a fundamental picture of what sociology is this was on a large scale: Kant’s moral system provided a way to think about societies, and the place of people in them, as the fundamental object of sociology.<sup>45</sup> There is thus a theoretical directness to Durkheim’s sociological translation of Kant.

Weber’s method of ideal types, however, introduces a greater element of irony into Kant’s move: ideal types are ‘purely negative’ – as Carlo Antoni put it – in generating contrasts.<sup>46</sup> They thus become heuristic concepts which can be rejected by us when they cease to be useful; we know they will fail. Nonetheless it is Kant’s move Weber makes. Ideal types introduce highly specific ‘transcendental’ conditions. What happens within their scope is not an account of what makes a particular phenomenon *possible* but rather what makes it *meaningful*. Kant was still interested in justifying reason,

---

<sup>41</sup> Kant 1998 [1781]

<sup>42</sup> Cf. LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 419-445

<sup>43</sup> See Nichols 2009.

<sup>44</sup> See Williams’ discussion of Goldmann’s account of Kant; Williams 2014c: 77-82; also Gellner 1971: 162<sup>n.1</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Durkheim 1994 [1912]: chp. 1 esp. 25-8. Also see Giddens 1971: 211 *et passim*; while Giddens only mentions Kant once in this article, his exposition of Durkheim nevertheless makes the relationship with Kant clear.

<sup>46</sup> Antoni 1962 [1940]: 186

albeit in a newly modest way by acknowledging its limits and conditions. His arena was the universe. Durkheim raised society into man's limit and condition. His arena (the state) was, like Aristotle's (the *polis*), the unit of human civilization.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, Weber was interested simply in providing scaffolding for interpretations.<sup>48</sup> To imagine a particular sort of rationality guiding some behaviour is to *imagine* that rationality as a condition of it, as time and space are conditions of rational thought for Kant; but all it is really a condition of is the sociologist's interpretation. Does this leave any room for possibilities to come into the equation, as I shall insist they must? We need something more than the fallacious intellectual-historical deduction that Kant's influence on early sociology *must* have left a residue of the transcendental deduction. We might look for a more substantive role for possibilities in Durkheim.

### 3. Durkheim

Hints of a focus on possibilities are available from Durkheim; but aside from the idea of society as a kind of transcendental condition, they are ephemeral. He says the following in defence of his (partially Kantian) treatment of society as a 'condition' different to society's opinions about itself ('social opinion'):

What we have to discover is society *as it is* [...]<sup>49</sup>

So far he might as well be sociologizing Ranke's history *wie es eigentliche gewesen*. The divine order is now a social condition to be displayed, indirectly, through facts. Society is thus a general, transcendental condition:

---

<sup>47</sup> Aristotle 1998: 1094<sup>a</sup>18-c.1094<sup>b</sup>12

<sup>48</sup> This is why neo-Weberians like Michael Mann reject the idea that the concept *society* indicates anything 'unitary'; Mann 2012: 1-2ff.

<sup>49</sup> Durkheim 1965 [1906]: 63, my emphasis

[S]ociety is a specific reality, however it is not an empire within an empire; it makes up a part of nature, of which it is the highest manifestation.<sup>50</sup>

But Durkheim specifies his view of a social condition in nature to contemporary (i.e. pre First World War French) society:

For example, the problem nowadays is to discover what should be the fate of morality in a society like our own, characterized by a growing concentration and unification [...]<sup>51</sup>

Now we have escaped, slightly, from Ranke, as long as we think that what a society is ‘characterized’ by – ‘growing concentration and unification’ – is something a little more than the facts. What little more this is happens to be rather hard to characterize; but next Durkheim suggests that it is in fact at least partially altered *possibilities* which are characteristic of (one assumes) his contemporary France:

[...] by *the increase in possibilities* of communication which bring into relation the different parts and further the absorption of local life in the general, by the rise of powerful industries, and the development of individualism which accompanies this centralization of all the social forces, etc.<sup>52</sup>

So it could be that it is specific possibilities which characterize what is sociologically interesting about a society during a particular phase in its history – perhaps during France’s long industrial revolution. Durkheim’s engagement with Kant already involved possibilities in so far as society became for him something like the transcendental condition of – in the terms of this passage – moral life. Society is what makes moral life possible. Here though one might read Durkheim as saying that sociologically interesting changes – ‘concentration’, ‘unification’, ‘absorption’ – consist

---

<sup>50</sup> Durkheim 1960 [1912]: 25

<sup>51</sup> Durkheim 1965 [1906]: 63

<sup>52</sup> Durkheim 1965 [1906]: 63, my emphasis



essentially in expansions and contractions of the possibilities characteristic of an era. Notice that this is one way to construe Ranke's (Hegelian) thought about what the historian ought to be doing, in so far as he says that we ought to be trying to grasp 'epochs' and their 'succession'.<sup>53</sup> But to get this out of Durkheim I have had to present a single and isolated passage frame by frame, and he provides us with no clear materials for developing such a story about possibilities any further – never mind towards a substantial conclusion. So, without a great work of overinterpretation, neither Ranke nor Durkheim gets us very far in exposing a less-than-transcendental but *fundamental* role for possibilities in history or sociology. Perhaps we should instead turn back to Weber.

#### 4. Weber II: Power

What we have said of Weber so far still draws him close to Kant. Ideal types are localized and temporary ways of keeping our nose above the chronicle, even if (and this is a good thing) they do not let us take full flight into Ranke's divine order. The method of ideal types as it is stated at the beginning of the first volume of *Economy and Society* has next to nothing to do with possibilities. The only exception to this is what Weber says about what it is for us to make claims about power relations.

'Power [*Macht*]', for Weber, 'is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'.<sup>54</sup> Weber adds that to claim that A has power over B (= 'domination' [*Herrschaft*]) means making a probabilistic statement: that should A command, B is *likely* to follow it. Beyond this, he says, *power* is a

---

<sup>53</sup> See above.

<sup>54</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 53

‘sociologically amorphous notion’, the point being that anything can be a means of power and, given the right means, “it” can be used for any purpose.<sup>55</sup> The result is that descriptions of power are descriptions of situations based on what seems likely to happen in them. Power is not a thing or a set of things.<sup>56</sup> Defining power further requires attempting to provide a typology of different political regimes as types of domination. The authority of those in charge of these regimes can be interpreted by Weber as resting on different bases, which he characterizes in ideal typical terms: *legal-rational*, *traditional*, and *charismatic*.<sup>57</sup>

It follows from this that applying a type-concept indicating a particular sort of political regime implies a probabilistic judgement. Imagine a regime which we characterize as resting on *legal-rational* authority, where debateable rules are what count. This implies that the set of commands which are likely to be followed in this regime is shaped in a particular way. An orator, or a man among men, would be better off trying to command in a regime characterized by *charismatic* authority, where personal power is persuasive. (Of course, twentieth-century Europeans faced the problem of what happens when a charismatic leader disrupts something more like a legal-rational authority in a democracy; we will address the theoretical problem of ‘routine politics’ in III below.) To use a regime-concept, then, might be construed as an operation consisting essentially in a claim about probabilities in a situation – the probability of obedience indicated by certain conditions. Leaders can miscalculate, as when the French army ignored Louis Phillipe’s orders, sent (of course) on the understanding that they would be obeyed, on

---

<sup>55</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 53

<sup>56</sup> In which case, as below I quote Geertz 1973 as saying, so-called ‘ontological’ projects in sociology seem wholly confused.

<sup>57</sup> See Weber 2013 [1922]: chp.2. Pure types are still *ideal* types. Weber refers to these as ‘pure’ types, and occasionally ‘rational’ types, not ‘ideal’; Weber 2013 [1922]: 217-219. Nevertheless, earlier he insists that ‘when reference is made to “typical” cases, the term should always be understood, unless otherwise stated, as meaning *ideal* types, which may in turn be rational or irrational’; Weber 2013 [1922]: 20.

23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1848. The apparent certainties of absolutism, reinstalled in Europe by Metternich and others at the Congress of Vienna, were shaken.

However, this still has not got us to an interesting role for *possibilities* as such, only probabilities. In III, I discuss Elster's way of transforming probabilities into possibilities, and I mention 1848 again in raising the problem of what he calls 'routine politics'. To assume this transformation while reading Weber's references to mere probability in *Economy and Society* would be – for all we have seen so far – the same overinterpretation I avoided in relation to Ranke and Durkheim. Yet, Weber also left us his earlier reflections concerning the nature of what he calls 'objective possibility'.

### 5. Weber III: Objective possibility

Weber drew his terms for his discussion of 'Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation' from von Kries and Radbruch respectively.<sup>58</sup> Von Kries was responding to Mill's reflections on statistical *probability* and causation in social science in *A System of Logic*.<sup>59</sup> Possibilities nonetheless play a role somewhat independent of probabilities for Weber in 'Critical Essays on the Logic of the Cultural Sciences'.<sup>60</sup> Probabilities are ways of judging how seriously we are to take particular possibilities, so possibilities

---

<sup>58</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 171; Heidelberger 2001 discusses the influence of von Kries' theory on subsequent accounts of probability – in Waismann and Wittgenstein. Heidelberger's notes von Kries' innovation in introducing the idea of *Spielraum*, or 'range', into probability theory. What I say later about conditional *possibilities* in IV is consistent with this approach: conditions do not have direct effects, as in a strictly nomothetic theory, but rather determine ranges of possibilities/probabilities; see Heidelberger 2001: 178. Weber's discussion in 2012 [1906] does not reflect this aspect of von Kries' theory, and this is reflected in his discussion of possibilities: he always treats them in the singular because he is so focussed on (singular) causation, even when they are treated as alternatives in counterfactuals. Thus he does not consider *ranges* of possibilities, and – given what I say below – might have blocked him from seeing possibility as playing a more fundamental role, beyond causal explanation.

<sup>59</sup> See Mill 1919 [1843]

<sup>60</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 139-184

have a kind of priority – though this is not something Weber emphasises directly.<sup>61</sup>

What is more, Weber thought that probabilities are of limited use for historians because precise, numerical judgements of probabilities are unavailable to them.<sup>62</sup>

A simplification of Weber's account is necessary at this point, given the range of topics, from intuition to value, with which his discussions of possibility are mixed.<sup>63</sup> The main role of possibilities for Weber is their role in counterfactuals exposing adequate causation. *Adequate* causation for Weber is a matter of grain. In *Roscher and Knies*, Weber raises the example of a boulder 'flung down from a rockface by a storm [...] shattered into numerous fragments'.<sup>64</sup> While in this earlier work causal explanation is discussed in relation to the problem of irrationality in action and the limits to what we would now call *intentionalist* explanations,<sup>65</sup> nonetheless the example demonstrates what Weber in the 'Critical Studies' means by 'adequate'. We understand the tumbling of the boulder (in one respect) *adequately* if we see *that* it's shattering is the result of its falling and landing, and perhaps the 'general degree of its fragmentation', and even 'the general direction' in which some of the fragments shot.<sup>66</sup> Possibility is implicit here, at least in Weber's account of our causal knowledge: *were* something radically unexpected to happen, we would be at a loss. This reveals the importance of a range of possibilities which, via rules, are to be considered ordinary in a context. Yet, even when the "laws of nature" (in Weber's scare-quotes) are not contradicted, we are not required to have knowledge of necessity. Rather, such knowledge is explicitly 'excluded' by Weber, and our use of the "laws of nature" is *a priori*.

---

<sup>61</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 180. I discuss this further in relation to Elster in III.

<sup>62</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 181

<sup>63</sup> For the relationship between possibility and these other elements in Weber's thought, see Turner and Factor 1981, Turner 1983, and Ringer 2003: 80-88.

<sup>64</sup> Weber 2012 [1903 – 1905]: 42

<sup>65</sup> Explanations, that is, which use intensional states (world-directly attitudes such as beliefs and desires) as explananda. Note that this does not require the relevant set of intensional states to form *intentions*.

<sup>66</sup> Weber 2012 [1903-1905]: 42. Subsequent quotations follow on the same page.

Really, Weber says, “laws of nature” are ‘rules of experience’, as much regularities of expectation as of nature.<sup>67</sup> (Thus they are for Weber what Quine would later call ‘synthetic *a priori*’ – knowledge discovered empirically, but employed to structure further experiences.<sup>68</sup>) Our expectations lead us into judgements of possibility when considering the relative importance of a limited set of aspects of an event in history. Despite the challenges presented by Weber’s broader concerns, his rules of experience in fact fit into a simple thought about the role of possibilities in grasping causation in history. Weber says that ‘every line of every historical account – indeed, every collection of archival material and documents destined for publication – contains ‘judgements of possibility’’.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, ‘it *must* contain them, if the publication is to have “value as knowledge”. The reason is that causal knowledge comes from abstracting elements from an event, applying rules of experience to them, and seeing that some rather than other possibilities became actual – in an expected way, given the abstracted elements as causal antecedents in our rules of experience.’<sup>70</sup>

The tumbling boulder, then, might as well be a historical event. Weber – following Meyer – mentions the Battle of Marathon (fought between the Persian Empire and the Athenians in 490 BCE). Had the battle not occurred, we cannot judge *quite* would have happened, but this does not mean we cannot judge at all its causal importance *adequately*. The Athenians won, albeit with some Pan-Hellenic help. Had the Persians won, one might imagine that the Athenian population, or at least a surviving proportion of it, would have come under the influence of Zoroastrianism, at that time the Persian

---

<sup>67</sup> Weber 2012 [1903-1905]: 82

<sup>68</sup> See Quine 1951

<sup>69</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 175

<sup>70</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 175

religion. The more precise we try to be about the form this would take – equivalent to the precise pattern of the boulder’s fragments – the less sure we can be.<sup>71</sup>

What we *can* do, however, is study the historical conditions of fifth-century BCE Greece and apply our rules of experience. By doing so, we can arrive at judgements about unactualized possibilities:

Thus, a judgement of “possibility” always implies a reference to rules of experience. The category of “possibility”, therefore, is not utilized in its *negative* form – that is to say: as an expression of the fact that we do not, or do not completely, know something (as opposed to the assertorical or apodictical judgement). Quite to the contrary, the judgement of “possibility” here implies a reference to positive *knowledge* of “rules governing events”, to our “nomological knowledge”, as it is usually termed.<sup>72</sup>

The parenthetical “clarification” would appear to add that the negative use of the concept of possibility would be in mere doubt, to be contrasted with the apparent certainty of asserted propositions or the absolute certainty of the apodictic. Between certainty and (fully negative) doubt, our use of rules of experience in judging events like the Battle of Marathon represents a ‘positive’ and yet intermediate form of knowledge.<sup>73</sup> It is a knowledge based on, but beyond, the facts. This takes us back to the contrast between Weber and the others: Ranke, Kant, Durkheim, and Aristotle. What historians know about on this account is not only ‘the facts’ – *pace* (a version of) Ranke – but also the surround of possibilities which frames them. This framing is tailored to specific portions of history, so we are not dealing with (another version of) Ranke and his ‘divine order’, or Kant’s very general categories of thought. Neither is the frame made of general knowledge about societies as such. Weber’s thought on possibilities remains

---

<sup>71</sup> This anticipates a point made by Geoffrey Hawthorn which I discuss in III.

<sup>72</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 175

<sup>73</sup> Cf. II below.

a float in the ocean of history in so far it is purely formal: it is up to the historian or sociologist to decide upon the contents by using the evidence delivered by their researches.

## 6. Possibilities in *Montaillou*

While Weber claimed that ‘every line’ of historiography is replete with possibilities, as we saw above, nonetheless these claims and the ‘positive’ function of possibility still emerge within a tight frame of their own: Weber’s interest in adequate causation.<sup>74</sup> While he rejects Karl Hampe’s view that ‘history knows no possibilities’,<sup>75</sup> he is still

---

<sup>74</sup> One unfulfilled possibility in the history of the methodology and philosophy of social science is that Alfred Shütz should have developed Weber’s interest in objective possibility and adequate causation in a novel direction. *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967 [1932]) was both a critique of and a retrospective philosophical groundwork for Weber’s sociology. Phenomenology is, foremost, the analysis of the contents of experience (*phenomena*). A central concern is the relevance of what is absent – other people, objects functioning as goals and instruments, the future or the past – to the structuring of experience; see Shütz 2013 [1936-7]: 226ff. The crucial step of the analysis is to notice that one’s perceptions or apperceptions are not simply given complete in sense-data, either with cognitive or non-cognitive contents; rather, one’s experience is already of the world: an object is experienced *as* an object, and a person *as* a person (including the first-person) – because one’s perception is taken to include not only what is given but also the practical possibilities which the object/person presents. Perception and therefore experience is thus immediately *meaningful*, and part of the benefit of this might be that it rids us of the problem of how to build-up meaning from meaningless sense-data or a social world from an asocial, Cartesian self. However, Shütz utilization of this more general phenomenological schema, which has its roots in eighteenth-century German thought (most famously in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*), including the relationship of his thought to Weber’s, is both highly specific and very complicated. That experience is structured by possibilities is something I acknowledge briefly later with reference to the phenomenological essay *L’Œil et l’Ésprit*; Merleau-Ponty 1964. However, phenomenology is not a central concern in this thesis. My thought (presented later) that action and other elements in a work of history should be treated as *conditions* for a future vector of possibilities cannot be considered the possession of that school; they express it only vaguely, if at all. I only touch on the character of experience to illustrate a more general theoretical point about possibilities. This might have been different had Shütz completed the book he had planned to write about Bergson: he left only notes, one of which projects a section called ‘Objects and Methods of the Social Sciences’ with a chapter on ‘Meaning interpretation and meaning positing; understanding objective chance and adequate causation’; Shütz 2013 [1927-1932]: 197.

<sup>75</sup> And he would have rejected the same thought expressed by one Shirley Letwin writing in *The Spectator*, who attracted Gellner’s ire in Weber’s (and Kant’s) name; Gellner 1971: 161<sup>n.1</sup>. Gellner discusses the role that historiography itself may have in furnishing us with a sense of the ‘horizons’ of our

concerned ultimately with *causation* in history.<sup>76</sup> We will not need to escape from Weber, as we did from Ranke's divine order; rather we will need to leave him aside to develop his idea that there is a 'positive' and *fundamental* role for possibilities in the history of societies, yet one which is not restricted by Weber's concern with causation. His concerns are not foreign to mine but simply different. Weber was interested in possibilities as instruments in explanations involving singular events like the Battle of Marathon. While the scale of these events can vary between the actions of individual people and epoch-making battles involving thousands, Weber's concern is with the quality of individual causal relationships, abstracted and isolated for inspection. The logical scale of his concern with possibilities is thus very restricted.

One can certainly find examples of judgements which seem to involve 'rules of experience' in *Montaillou*. At one point, for instance, LeRoy Ladurie posits a connection between transhumant shepherding and the patterning of social contacts which gave Montaillou a regular relationship with Toulouse.<sup>77</sup> In a fairly mundane way, one could insist that this implies – as for Weber every line in a work of history should – a judgement of possibilities: were the Pyrenees richer, materially and demographically, it might have developed internal markets and its own cities, and escaped or at least changed its relationship with Toulouse. However, making this explicit serves only to underline an actual relationship and some aspects of its 'adequate' aetiology.

---

present, understood as the limits of our possible (=conceivable) futures. He suggests that some sociological elements may contribute to this, but his central concern is to map the 'types of horizon' internal to societies, such as whether they maintain a naturalistic world-view or not. Given my argument later, I would certainly interpret this as one way in which possibilities might characterize a society at a particular time, though what Gellner says is just one way in which this can happen and he is focussed on contemporary society, not medieval *Montaillou*; see Gellner 1971: 160ff. For more recent and more precisely documented discussions of ways in which ancient historical societies have organized their relationship with the future, see Lloyd 2017 and Rochberg 2017, to which I return in V.

<sup>76</sup> Weber 2012 [1906]: 174

<sup>77</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 161



Despite his tight focus on the village of Montaillou itself, LeRoy Ladurie is not blind to its wider position in the mountains surrounded by Capetian France, Catalonia, and a shakily “reconquered” Spain, none of which could escape being drawn into the lines of Papal, trading Italy and Henry VII’s Holy Roman Empire, and the conflicts between them. LeRoy Ladurie conveys the village in its restrictions, leaving an overall impression half-way between forms indicated by Marx. In one, the village makes its own life as ‘a mere appendage to the land’.<sup>78</sup> In another, ‘the cultivated area appears as the territory of the city’, which it feeds and sends men to fight for.<sup>79</sup> Transhumant shepherding was not independent of city markets; but it was sufficiently distanced from them to let mountain villages like Montaillou and the temporary shepherd’s camps (*cabanes*) retain their cultural gravity. Yet, *Montaillou* is not an essay on medieval urban-rural relations, and the ‘rule of experience’ connecting transhumance with a pattern of social contacts is just one, third-of-a-page shot in a six-hundred-and-fifty page fusillade of stories and reflections. One way to discriminate a role for possibilities, through the smoke, is Weber’s: isolate adequate causal relationships by judging how things might have been otherwise to explain why what happened happened. However, we will pursue a more fundamental role for possibilities in history. We will ask if possibilities play a more general yet deeper role in the fabric of *Montaillou* by treating it as the portrayal of a *situation*. Various elements of the book specify this situation in different ways, but the situation itself comprises an overall range of possibilities for action which is characteristic of the time and place. The rest of this thesis is devoted to showing that this simple idea has consequences for how we understand sociological concepts, historical judgements, and action – generally and in

---

<sup>78</sup> Marx 1964 [1857-8]: 71

<sup>79</sup> Marx 1964 [1857-8]: 71

*Montaillou*. First, however, we need to make one final attempt to pin-down exactly what sort of possibilities we are dealing with.

## **7. Some more Hegel: Real possibilities**

In what follows from the Berlin *Lectures on Logic* of 1831, Hegel expresses a resolute view about the irrelevance of logical possibility to historiography:

In *historiography* we must grant validity to whatever is simply there as reported [without its being necessary]. As soon as we say of something actual that it is only logically possible, we at once recognize that we are dealing a one-sided, defective form of the thing. Within whatever is actual, non-contradictory identity with itself is present, but it is present only as a single aspect [of a whole sequence of events], and is thus considered to be by itself something untrue.<sup>80</sup>

This purely negative statement ends what has been edited as a section in Hegel's lectures. It contains their final explicit mention of historiography. Yet, as one might expect from Hegel, there seems to be a clear subtext regarding history in what he goes on to say about modality (i.e. necessity, contingency, possibility, actuality). Some of what he says might therefore be interpreted as statements about the nature of historiography, whatever else he is also concerned with.

What comes immediately next in the same lecture is a further negative statement about the concept of contingency. We might think that history is about contingent events. However, Hegel says that '[c]ontingency here is actuality that merely has the value of

---

<sup>80</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 156-7. Square-brackets in the quotations are Butler's. I have relied on parts of the Berlin lectures of 1831 which can be usefully compared to the *Science of Logic*; Hegel 2010 [1812-1833]: 477-505.

logical possibility attached to it'.<sup>81</sup> He seems to be indicating that to say something is 'contingent' is simply to say that it (actually) exists, or has occurred, and might not have. If I can presume on a subtext about history, then Hegel is arguing that historians should not be concerned with an event's contingency, as such. The reason he says this is that, according to his definition, to say event *e* is 'contingent' is simply to say *e* happened and that it is therefore proven to be possible in the logical sense he says (just before the passage I quoted) historians must 'do away' with as 'trivial'.<sup>82</sup>

I want to follow Hegel to a more interesting, positive claim: there is a sort of possibility which is the historian's special concern. Hegel calls this 'real possibility' in contradistinction to 'logical possibility' or 'mere possibility'.<sup>83</sup> What he means is that there is a sort of possibility which is relative to what is actual at specific times and places. Recall that in history, Hegel says, 'we must grant validity' to what is actual. Why must we? Hegel himself provides no explicit answer; but the notion of real possibility lets us reconstruct one. Later, he defines real possibility as possibility relative to conditions:

Within the contingency of immediate actuality there is still something else than that actuality, and with such immediate actuality we thus have a *condition* [of something else]. If something else is to be [really] possible, its [necessary] conditions must all be present. But its conditions are existents that, in their immediate existence, do not bother themselves with anything else to come. Yet something is *really possible* only by virtue of having such conditions.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 157

<sup>82</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 157

<sup>83</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 157-164

<sup>84</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 159

Now we can see a little better why Hegel is so dissatisfied with the notion of contingency. In the subtext about history I have been following in his lecture, the notion of contingency restricts the purview of history to what is actual, about which one can only make the vacuous claim that what is actual is logically possible. He might have put it another way. He might have said that thinking about history through the category of contingency, while it ‘grants validity’ to what is actual, stops there. It treats what is actual as a bald *conclusion* with nothing following it, and this does not tell us much about it – action, say – from a historical point of view.

*Real* possibility, though, still ‘grants validity’ to what is actual, but it avoids treating it merely as the conclusion of a prior chain of events. Rather, ‘immediate actuality’ contains ‘something else than that actuality’; it functions as a condition making what comes next (really) possible.<sup>85</sup> This is why, in the subtext I have suggested extracting, Hegel sees real possibility as the proper concern of history. It makes history equivalent to the identification of real possibility through the interpretation of conditions: ‘[c]ontingency [in the initial conditions] is destined to fall away, and the [real] possibility of something else is itself a condition of itself’.<sup>86</sup>

From the point of view of History, then, the very existence of something contingent and actual is dependent on its being a condition for what comes next.<sup>87</sup> This is what enables the contingent and actual thing (for my purposes, an action in history) to have a particular historical character. To explain it historically, in my account, is *not* to represent it as the conclusion of a prior chain of events. Rather, it is to represent it as a historical condition – and therefore somewhat like a premise for subsequent

---

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Hegel 2001 [1831]: 159.

<sup>86</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 159

<sup>87</sup> I discuss this issue again by offering an alternative to Arthur Danto’s analysis of ‘narrative sentences’; see Danto 1986 and 1962, and part IV below.

possibilities. Yet, unfortunately, Hegel seems to restrict us to singular real possibilities and thus a resolute account of necessity in history.

For my purposes, it is desirable to separate what Hegel says about conditions and individual action from the stronger claims he makes about necessity in history. This is not mere *logical* necessity, but something like what Isaiah Berlin called ‘historical inevitability’.<sup>88</sup> ‘Necessity’, Hegel says, ‘appears as violence, a loss of freedom’.<sup>89</sup> The reason is that there is a singular ‘matter at hand’ such as a revolution or an epic clash of peoples. This ‘matter at hand’, beginning as a real possibility, emerges to become actual out of the conditions which made it really possible in the first place. This happens inevitably. As Clark Butler suggests, for Hegel it may involve a process where the possibilities determined by initial conditions ‘are narrowed until there is but one necessary outcome’.<sup>90</sup> This seems to leave a space in Hegel’s account for a category of possibilities he does not name between ‘mere’ logical necessity and ‘real possibility’. These are possibilities which are not parts of the singular ‘matter at hand’ but which are sensitive to or dependent on historically specific conditions. The ‘real possibility’ is then a special case of this anonymous category. The claim that such special cases occur is what makes Hegel’s thesis about ‘violent’ necessity substantive.

Pursuing this takes one off into Hegel’s (substantive) moral, political, and historical philosophy.<sup>91</sup> He says that while some individuals like Caesar or Herakles might recognise and accept this violent necessity, embracing it in their actions, ‘[n]o individual is capable of doing anything against the matter at hand’.<sup>92</sup> Other individuals

---

<sup>88</sup> Berlin 1953: esp. 31

<sup>89</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 163

<sup>90</sup> See Hegel 2001 [1831]: 158<sup>n.26</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. e.g. Hegel 1991: esp. §§115-118; Hegel 1975: 1040-1110 (quoted selectively above); also see Dale 2014: 161-184.

<sup>92</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 162

like criminals only accept this necessity ‘ruefully’, and thus they act ‘as inwardly compelled against their will’ when punished. But Hegel thinks that, while someone in a criminal condition will experience punishment as violence, in fact it gives them the ‘freedom’ to which they have a ‘right’ – because it transforms them out of their criminal condition. The superior freedom of a Caesar or Herakles comes from the ‘serenity’ with which they accept the ‘real possibility’ (= ‘the matter at hand’) and embrace it in their action.<sup>93</sup>

If Hegel’s substantive thesis about ‘hard’ or ‘violent’ necessity in history (a) is effaced, at least from the core account, we are left with two pertinent remainders. One<sup>94</sup> (b) is what he says directly about conditions:

But conditions are specific existents that have validity for themselves. The existent conditions of a house include stones, beams, funds, which are all necessary conditions of the house. They are also conditions of many other outcomes than the house. And since they also bear reference to something other than the house, as conditions merely of this house they are contradictory.<sup>95</sup>

Hegel thinks that the course of history involves its own inevitable swells and breaks, regularly throwing individuals onto the rocks. But he does not seem to see this as a matter emerging from the nature of conditions as such. The conditions of a house are all conditions of ‘many other outcomes’. It is only when ‘the complex of conditions’ is brought together in a ‘totality’ or ‘whole’ that they presage a single ‘real possibility’.<sup>96</sup> The thesis about ‘hard’ necessity is a direct result of opting, at a fairly late point in the

---

<sup>93</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 164

<sup>94</sup> I discuss the second remainder (c) below.

<sup>95</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 158

<sup>96</sup> Hegel 2001 [1831]: 160

argument, for a lemma casting *one and only one* real possibility in such circumstances. This is a substantive claim over and above Hegel's core modal 'logic' and it seems to derive from his *classical* preoccupations.

In turning to consider *Montaillou* – an extended *medieval* example – we can put this aside. I can reject Hegel's singular quantification of real possibilities relative to conditions, at least as an essential part of my own account, without trying to prove its falsity.<sup>97</sup> But this does not stop me retaining the idea (c) that what is important about an action *historically* lies in an account of its status as a condition (as in (b)) of what comes next. For Hegel, Caesar's world-historical power-grab is a condition of the fall of the Republic. But on my account – developed in part IV – what comes next must be conceived as a set of possibilities constrained, but only at one end, by the action in question. The possibilities we will be dealing with here are of that 'intermediate' sort Hegel mentions but fails to name. We can call them 'real possibilities' as long as we remember that we have rejected Hegel's substantive thesis that there is a single 'matter at hand' which provides an artificially clear criterion for distinguishing between real and unreal possibilities. Real possibilities, in our sense, are simply those which are generated within – and which are characteristic of – historically specific situations; and it might be that we have to work quite hard, as historians and sociologists, to judge what the detailed possibilities are in any given situation. With *Montaillou* we will need to think carefully about how to do justice to the complexity of the situation LeRoy Ladurie was trying to portray, but also about how we can navigate this complexity without getting lost among the trees. This is why I have chosen to focus only on sociological concepts, historical judgements, and historical actions, and some of the connections between them.

---

<sup>97</sup> I offer an explicit argument for the neutrality of my account with respect to claims of necessity or causal inevitability in IV.

## ***PART TWO: MONTAILLOU – PUZZLES AND COMMENTARIES***

It is a matter of knowing whether there are sides and whether there is a whole.<sup>98</sup>

### **8. Systems: A little community**

Let us approach *Montaillou* itself indirectly, at first, by raising a puzzle concerning what is visible in it – both the visible things described by LeRoy Ladurie and what is visible, or ‘manifest’, to his reader: the text itself.<sup>99</sup> I will raise the puzzle in two stages. The first stage (here) involves considering how the visible aspects of a village like Montaillou lead us to generalize about how the place is organized, deliberately or not, in a text or in itself, into *systems*. The second stage involves considering exactly the sorts of *judgements* involved in seeing some sort of order in a community like *Montaillou* or in sustaining regular expectations about it as a particular locus of study.

Later I shall want to develop a theory; but I want to start with some richer, more descriptive material which will draw our intuitions into the theory. So how does one begin with *systems*? We begin *in media res*, as Robert Redfield says it is likely we should:

In moving to understand the systematic character of the life of a community the student cannot begin everywhere; he must begin at some point. What shall that point be?

Commonly the beginning is made with the things immediately visible. Prominent are the houses, the tools, the work of the house and of the forest, the field or the byre. If we look at the published accounts of primitive or peasant life, we are likely to find descriptions of the work on and with the land in the first pages or chapters. It is safe to

---

<sup>98</sup> Eco 1984: 65

<sup>99</sup> Cf. White 1974: 2



say that almost any student of any simple community probably attended early in the course of his work to just this subject matter: the land and the work upon it and with it, the things taken to eat or otherwise to consume, and the material objects made. These things are visible, and understanding them is relatively easy.<sup>100</sup>

Redfield's meditation on how to begin encapsulates the quasi-anthropological method so excitingly adopted by Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie for *Montaillou, un village Occitan de 1294 à 1324*.<sup>101</sup> Popular reviewers usually resort to the word 'magisterial' when they get excited about a long and complicated history book and do not know quite what to say about why it is good.<sup>102</sup> In one way, *Montaillou* escapes this term because its point is its small scale, its focus on what Redfield calls a 'little community' and the petty scenes in which it is revealed. Yet somehow one still wants to say 'magisterial'. We will inquire in detail *why*.

Along with Carlo Ginzberg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, a completely different book in almost all respects, *Montaillou* is one of the two bases of the industry which has come to be called 'microhistory' (the subsequent productions of which will not be in evidence here).<sup>103</sup> LeRoy Ladurie never used the term, just as Jesus of Nazareth – the earthly man – could never have thought of employing the word 'Christianity' because the sense of the term depends on his having been crucified.<sup>104</sup> (Here we will not ask about further parallels in the reception of major authors.) Instead, LeRoy Ladurie begins *Montaillou* with an *avant-propos* entitled *De l'Inquisition à l'ethnographie*, explaining that the documents detailing the Inquisition of the Cathars (on whom more) in Montaillou – a small village of about two-hundred and fifty souls in the high

---

<sup>100</sup> Redfield 1960: 19

<sup>101</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975

<sup>102</sup> Dominic Sandbrook provides a recent example in his comments on Preston's *The Spanish Holocaust*, reproduced on its cover; Preston 2012: the book discusses the later "Inquisition" in Spain – not of heretics but of revolutionaries.

<sup>103</sup> Ginzberg 1984

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Brown 1995

Pyrenees near the Ariège river – will be employed as if they were the field notes of a contemporary ethnographer. He also calls *Montaillou* a ‘monographie’, a term connoting a self-standing investigation of great focus.<sup>105</sup> By contrast, the ‘great syntheses – regional, national, western’ of Goubert, Poitrineau, Fourquin, Fossier, Duby, and Bloch<sup>106</sup> shield us from ‘the direct view: the testimony without intermediary’ of the peasant himself.<sup>107</sup> To get back to what is immediately visible, we need an ethnographer.

That is to say, an ethnographer available in the 1970s; this is why LeRoy Ladurie turns often to Redfield’s *The Little Community* and *Peasant Society and Culture*, published in a single volume in 1960, as a comparatively recent guide. Apart from the fact that Redfield never burnt any of his peasant subjects at the stake, at least not on record, the information gleaned by the inquisitive Jacques Fournier, later Pope Benôit XII of Avignon, is sufficiently *quotidienne* to be considered at least *quasi* ethnographical. For instance, local shepherd Pierre Maury is to be found wondering what the parents of his sister’s husband will do if they find that he has fetched her from her abusive marriage.<sup>108</sup> He said she said. They went. Etc. Such things, quite as Redfield says, are visible and easy to understand, to begin with. He suggests that both ethnographers and their texts will start with such details, which seem to confront the outsider with the newness of what he calls an ‘intuited whole’.<sup>109</sup>

There is a deeply realistic irony to his thought that:

The first impressions of any human community are often clear and – at the moment – very convincing. The time to write a book about the national character of a people

---

<sup>105</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 19

<sup>106</sup> Bloch was almost solely responsible for the opening of the French historiographical tradition substantially to anthropology; see Bloch 1939 and 1940.

<sup>107</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 9

<sup>108</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 83

<sup>109</sup> Redfield 1960: 18

other than one's own is in the first few weeks of the first acquaintance with them.

Never again does one have so vivid and compelling an impression of them.<sup>110</sup>

The lasting quality of such a book is of course in doubt, regardless of its sales-figures and margin. Its value may be little more than if one had written a book in the first weeks of acquaintance with one's own community. One considers, perhaps, that the principled metaphysical holist about societies must be someone who fails to stay in any of them for very long: 'If one does not write that book it may be because a certain amount of scientific training and sense of responsibility prevent one.'<sup>111</sup> Books unwritten are thus in one sense the best testament to social science, and certainly the opposite holds:

And one knows that in Sweden or in Yucatán one's first impressions give way to understanding based on deeper knowledge of particular fact. After knowing the whole as one thing, intuitively, one begins to know particular things, critically, and, it seems, less surely.<sup>112</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a value to naïve and vivid first impressions: in so far as we are aware of them as such, they give us a scent to pursue. As we know more, so we know less, and less certainly;<sup>113</sup> and in this state of doubt we achieve a deeper knowledge of a little community, and perhaps a larger community or society too:

Then the student of a human community begins to put pieces of knowledge together to make new, larger organizations of understanding. Little by little, he builds new forms of thought about at least parts of that community. He makes new wholes, understanding as he goes the ways in which parts are connected with other parts, and seeing, from time

---

<sup>110</sup> Redfield 1960: 18

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Geertz 1973: 22; for holism-versus-individualism and the confusing round of 'methodological wrangling' it can elicit – as Brodbeck 1974: 287 put it – see the contributions to O'Neill (ed.) 1974.

<sup>112</sup> Redfield 1960: 18

<sup>113</sup> This phrase anticipates Geoffrey Hawthorn's in *Plausible Worlds* (1991), discussed in III below.

to time, new wholes or part-wholes. The intuitive apprehension of wholes does not cease; but now it is limited and controlled by particular knowledge subjected to testing and proof.<sup>114</sup>

A society considered as a whole, at least as something understandable in some way beyond the ‘particular’ and ‘visible’ facts which one is ‘first’ and ‘easily’ acquainted with, as something inhering in the ‘connections’ between these facts, cannot therefore easily be considered as a *ding an sich* – so what is it? What is the knowledge or understanding we reach of societies by unceasingly intuiting or more consciously constructing aspects of them as wholes or ‘part-wholes’? Redfield, LeRoy Ladurie’s field-guide to ethnography, has a fairly conventional answer to these questions. A society can be grasped not merely as an innocently ‘intuited whole’ but as a *system*. All this we learn about in the tone of the narrator of a 1950s American public information broadcast:

We have before us a problem of the relations of intuited wholes, particular facts, and systems. An intuited whole appears in the immediate and unconsidered apprehension of the unique character of something recognized as complex but taken as one thing. A system, on the other hand, is another kind of whole: it is an analysed whole; the entities that compose it and their interrelationships are understood. It is such an arrangement of related parts as may be seen separated from other things about it. I see a community first as an intuited whole. I then begin to understand particular things about it. From the connections now discovered among these parts I conceive of systems. We shall become interested here in considering the possibility that very much, perhaps all, of the life of a community may be conceived as just a few systems, possibly as one all-encompassing system. Can an intuited whole give way, as study proceeds, to one equally comprehensive analysed system?<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> Redfield 1960: 18

<sup>115</sup> Redfield 1960: 18-19

What a system is, why it is important, and what the ‘connections’ are which constitute them is left to the reader to decide; an authority, however, has been out to see them, and he has kindly reported back. Indeed, perhaps he is more able to show what his apparently technical but nevertheless ‘intuited’ concept of *system* is unable to say. The reader is asked to follow him in the first person through his first encounters with the inhabitants of Chan Kom. To begin is to begin with things visible, as he says, and ‘understanding them is relatively easy’ – but there are lots of them and the pen flows quickly. What follows would be an unjustifiably long quotation were it not for its revealing a single *datum* of Redfield’s experience and expertise in the field, recollected in a single, enthusing flash:

This was my own case when I began to study the Maya Indian village of Chan Kom. I began where it happened to be convenient to begin. I went along with a man to the field he had cleared in the forest for the planting of his maize. I watched him cut poles and with them build a little altar in the field. I saw him mix ground maize with water and sprinkle it in the four directions, and then kneel in prayer. I watched him then move across the field punching holes in the shallow soil with a pointed stick and dropping a few grains of maize in each hole.

From this, I naturally followed forward the activities involved in the further development of the maize and the harvest. The corn sprouted. I saw the agriculturalist cut away the weeds. Later in the summer one could watch him bend over the ripening ears to protect them from destructive animals. When the ears are ripe, the men tear them from the stalk and carry them to the house, or else store them, stacked close together in granaries built out in the center [sic] of the maize field.

As I witnessed such things done, I talked to the people about the earlier agricultural preparations, made before I came to the village. My mind was thus led backward to the activities which preceded the planting: back to the burning of the fallen trees to make a clearing in which to plant maize; and back of that to the felling of the trees to make possible the burning and the planting. My mind could as well be said to

move forward to the next planting. For this is of course an annual cycle. It is repeated (almost) every year. Soon after the harvest is in, the Maya agriculturalist begins again to choose a spot in the forest where he may cut down the trees there to make a new milpa, as he calls it.

While my attention was upon this series of activities, necessarily interconnected in the same invariable order, I was recognizing one particular system within the whole that is the life of Chan Kom. What is the nature of the order among the parts that make up this system of agricultural activities? Plainly, the parts are related to one another as links to a chain, or as means to an end, each means leading to the next means, and so on. Thinking of it as a chain, one sees that many links are connected with subsidiary related chains of means and ends. The system could be extended and complicated by adding the activities of marketing, or by attaching to the right link in the chain the activities which convert maize into the food for the agriculturalist's family.

The course of my thoughts as I worked in Chan Kom did not, I suppose, follow only the simply lines of connection offered by the cycle of agricultural activities. As I worked I learned things other than those I have already mentioned, and as I learned, the organization of ideas about the life of the village changed. New systems presented themselves to me, and systems I had already apprehended became modified and complicated.<sup>116</sup>

The easiness of the visible thus gives way to the complications of system, and the greater work begins. The agricultural system in Chan Kom is a cycle of productive activity, with hints offered of the importance allotted to this activity in the broader life of the community: the tri-poled alter, rite as *objet trouvé*, has no easily understood purpose in a dusty field of maize, so it becomes the trace of another 'system', of belief, to be traced in other phases of the visit. Next 'the practical series of acts' in the maize field is discovered to be 'not the same in one class of fields as it was in the other class

---

<sup>116</sup> Redfield 1960: 19-20

of fields'. There are two sorts of field; the agricultural 'system' is therefore said to be 'compound'.<sup>117</sup> One learns what a system *is* by seeing one split: the chains of tasks which comprise the activity are what differentiate them. Some fields require clearing of brush and trees, but others are already established. Redfield is describing one system simply of maintenance and reproduction – of reaping and reward – another of hard-won expansion; the community is not a repetitive, machine-like system, but one which manages its own place, literally, in the world:

I became more attendant to features of the natural environment which were involved in these practical activities. In short, I changed the system in my mind to make it include features of the land itself. When it came to considering more carefully the choice of the site of the cornfield, I learned the differences in soils, the indications by way of the kinds of trees growing there and other signs on the land which would enable the agriculturalist to choose tracts which might be more fertile than others. I came to understand the hazards and uncertainties attendant upon the first coming of the rainfall, and how this uncertainty affected the choice of the day on which the felled trees for the new cornfield were to be burned.

The rapid take-off from 'easy' detail to system immediately leads Redfield to a summary of what he already claims to have put 'in short' – in a system, of course, one thing leads to another, breathlessly:

In short, I began to see that the activities of the Indians were in part reflections of the regularities and irregularities of nature: of the invariably changing seasons and of the variable weather. I became more attentive to the land and to the heavens above. Gradually I came to see that these Indians dwelt in a very simply landscape in which a few features, some natural and some man-made, limited and expressed the activities of

---

<sup>117</sup> Redfield 1960: 20-21

the community. I saw four of these principal features. One, the bush, the thorny, low forest covering all of the flat limestone shelf on which the people lived. Two, the natural wells, called cenotes, places at which the limestone has fallen away to leave deep dark holes down to the ground water; these cenotes provide all the water for the people; there are in this land no rivers, streams, or lakes. These two features, forest and cenote, are nature's provision. The cenote is a fresh, green punctuation in a dry monotony of thorny bush; only at cenotes may men make settlements. Three and four of the major features of this land are man-made: the maize fields or milpa, and the village itself. Man clears the forest to make the milpa; man goes to the cenote to build his house. One might almost state these relations as a proportion: the milpa is to the bush as the village is to the cenote.<sup>118</sup>

As well as maize in the fields, *ideas* are still growing in Redfield's mind: the chain-like activity-system of annual clearance and planting fits into a broader 'topographical' system 'which would take the form of a map'.<sup>119</sup> The map would show fields, uncleared bush, cenotes, and houses. From the visibility of clusters of houses, one would spot a village; but in these villages Redfield sees further coordinates. One is maize itself, which he thinks is so central to the life of Chan Kom as to be the marker of a third system, neither chain-like or map-like, but 'radial'. 'Maize', as Redfield says, 'is always at the center of things', not least because there is so much of it about given the mode of production. A fourth system is elicited from the 'pious contract' he sees governing the Indians' use of their resources: the hunter recognizes the part played by the gods in delivering him a deer, so he leaves some of it to them.<sup>120</sup> Neither does he use more land than he needs for cultivation. It is expensive, in some *invisible* way, to do so. The system of contract requires some careful digging.

---

<sup>118</sup> Redfield 1960: 21

<sup>119</sup> Redfield 1960: 22

<sup>120</sup> Redfield 1960: 23



For all his systemizing, Redfield keeps his head where others might lose theirs to leviathans. Systems never usurp the details through which they are apprehended; they are never reified, never mind personified or embodied, as with Hobbes.<sup>121</sup> If at first we were tempted, it was the mere enthusiasm of a first impression:

Rather than regarding social structure as one of a number of interrelated systems making up the whole that is village life, some parts of one system connecting some parts of others, we may find it possible to make social structure the central, constant, organizing idea with which to examine all aspects of the life of the community. If I understand him rightly, this is what Professor [Meyer] Fortes does. “Social structure ... is the entire culture of a given people handled in a special frame of theory.” From this position social structure is the holistic concept: the central organizing idea in terms of which everything else in the life of the community, so far as it proves possible, is seen. One does not move from social structure to religious system; one sees, for example, the rituals in Chan Kom wherein the rain-gods are asked by the people for rain and good harvest as an expression of the structure of interdependence that binds one agriculturalist to the others of the community and of their common connections with the supernaturals.<sup>122</sup>

Social structure is therefore a lens, not another artefact of the field.<sup>123</sup> The invisible is made to answer to the visible, as in Weber’s insistence on *heuristic* ideal types. Weber and Redfield require a return to the visible – the rituals directed at the rain-gods of Chan Kom. What, then, is a ‘system’ in Redfield’s sense? Sometimes it is a chain of linked

---

<sup>121</sup> Hobbes 2016 [1651]: 120-1

<sup>122</sup> Redfield 1960: 50

<sup>123</sup> Contrast Parsons 1977: 134-140, where Parsons’ fourfold scheme of functions leads him to deduce that ‘[t]he differentiation of autonomous structures necessitates the development of a generalized monetary medium in association with a market system’.

practical tasks, like cultivating a field. Here the visible parts become a system, in Redfield's mind, when he thinks of the absent, invisible parts of the annual cycle, before and after the work of the day. Sometimes it is a map-like arrangement of interrelated features – fields, bush, cenotes, houses. Sometimes it is a crop, maize, which Redfield might have said was imposed on the map-system like the North of a compass. Finally, a system is a manner of dealing with the gods. Do all these things – chains, maps, directions, contracts – have something in common which makes each of them a system? It seems only to be that they give us some sense of a regularity characteristic of the little community. They each describe ways in which visible things relate to each other in time and space, and to the extent to which they can be described statically it is because the same things happen in this community again and again. The static *imago* of the system describes a dynamic set of relationships which is never entirely present. What is absent? What do we do when we grasp what Redfield calls a 'system'? What happens when the new entrant into a society starts to go beyond what is visible – mundane? Let us follow Adso and William into the abbey of *The Name of the Rose*, set in the same fervent pulse of mid-13<sup>th</sup> to early-14<sup>th</sup> century heresies and Inquisitions as *Montaillou*

## **9. Judgements: The name of a horse**

The abbey is a 'system', if anything is. Adso's eyes are drawn to the Aedificium (the tower of central function in the abbey: refectory, scriptorium, kitchens, library), and it strikes him, as Redfield says it will, as harmonic:

As we came closer, we realized that the quadrangular form included, at each of its corners, a heptagonal tower, five sides of which were visible on the outside – four of the eight sides, then, of the greater octagon producing four minor heptagons, which from the outside appeared as pentagons. And thus anyone can see the admirable

concord of so many holy numbers, each revealing a subtle spiritual significance. Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.<sup>124</sup>

The divine architectural ordering is a supposed mirror, a *speculum*, of the institution it contains; the Hours of the day given by the Rule of St. Benedict, the labyrinthine library, the places allotted within the walls for eating, sleeping, praying, working, and burying. As Adso – a novice – explores the abbey with William, a senior Franciscan and perhaps more importantly an Oxonian and Baconian, they decipher how the place works. Their urgent purpose for doing so is that Death has become a loose cog in the machine, with two young monks mysteriously dead within the first hundred pages. The acumen of William is established as they arrive at *Prime* near the dawn, about half past seven in the morning of a wintry Italy:

As our little mules strove up the last curve of the mountain, where the main path divided into three, producing two side paths, my master stopped for a while, to look around: at the sides of the road, at the road itself, and above the road, where, for a brief stretch, a series of evergreen pines formed a natural roof, white with snow.<sup>125</sup>

William's 'acumen' is introduced *outside* of the abbey, surrounded by a nature fittingly allegorical for a Franciscan but penetrable, too, to a Baconian. William thus combines veneration of nature with its decipherment. The choice of roads as a representation of moral jeopardy, with different fates awaiting different choices, is common enough.<sup>126</sup> The abbey looming ahead ought then to be a refuge of Christian civilization, but these are times fraught with Inquisitions, crusades, accusations of heresy, a new and

---

<sup>124</sup> Eco 1984: 22

<sup>125</sup> Eco 1984: 22

<sup>126</sup> See the discussion of Dürer's *Hercules at the Crossroads* in Geuss 2005: 78-96.

emotional florescence of ecstatic visions in church architecture, and above all competition between the Emperor Louis and the Pope (at Avignon, not Rome) John XXII. Dangerous times when acumen is required, especially within the strangely harmonious machine of the abbey. William approaches it from the distance of an ethnographer: ““A rich abbey,” he said. “The abbey likes a great display on public occasions.””<sup>127</sup>

Is this an insult, coming from a member of an order doubly devoted to poverty?<sup>128</sup> At any rate, William speaks of the abbey first as a whole, as a Hobbesian or Durkheimian person-like or bodily system with its own proclivities. He also knows what Redfield teaches, and what the young Adso who is so impressed by its mathematico-theological harmony needs to learn: that such a first impression needs to be treated with suspicion. They are approached by an ‘agitated band of monks and servants’. Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer at the abbey (‘vulgar in appearance but jolly’<sup>129</sup>), greets them:

“I thank you, Brother Cellarer,” my master replied politely, “and I appreciate your courtesy all the more since, in order to greet me, you have interrupted your search. But don’t worry. The horse came this way and took the path to the right. He will not get far, because he will have to stop when he reaches the dungheap. He is too intelligent to plunge down that precipitous slope....”

“When did you see him?” the cellarer asked.

“We haven’t seen him at all, have we, Adso?” William said, turning toward me with an amused look. “But if you are hunting for Brunellus, the horse can only be where I have said.”

---

<sup>127</sup> Eco 1984: 22

<sup>128</sup> See Vauchez 2012

<sup>129</sup> Eco 1984: 27

The cellarer hesitated. He looked at William, then at the path, and finally asked, “Brunellus? How did you know?”

“Come, come,” William said, “it is obvious you are hunting for Brunellus, the abbot’s favourite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes. He went to the right, as I said, but you should hurry, in any case.”

The cellarer hesitated for a moment longer, then gestured to his men and rushed off along the path to the right, while our mules resumed their climb. A few minutes later, monks and servants reappeared, leading the horse by its halter.<sup>130</sup>

Here we have the common *abduction* of the fictional sleuth:<sup>131</sup> the facts are made to work as coordinates of the possible which taken together lead William to the probable, but it leaves Adso dumbfounded. The clues are: hoofprints in the snow (their regularity testifying to the character of the animal), broken twigs at a certain height, traces of hair in a blackberry bush, the layout of the paths. The rest of the horse’s physiognomy comes from a guess based on William’s knowledge of the ideal of a horse – not the Platonic ideal form (about which William has more to say, as we shall see), but the popular ideal set out by Isidore of Seville; the monks would *want* to think of their horse this way. William has described a horse and where it probably went:

“All right,” I said, “but why Brunellus?”

“What other name could it possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus.”

---

<sup>130</sup> Eco 1984: 22-3, with some omissions.

<sup>131</sup> Later Eco has William mention his ‘deduction’, which it is not. Deduction would move along certain rails; abduction is the clever interpretation of clues.

This was my master's way. He not only knew how to read the great book of nature, but also knew the way monks read the books of Scripture, and how they thought through them.<sup>132</sup>

There is more to this than common whodunit-ism. What astounds Adso is that William's specifying the name of the horse seems to move him beyond a knowledge of the possible and the probable towards a knowledge of the particular. If names fix essences, as when later one of the theologians of the abbey says 'fish' has a plain meaning,<sup>133</sup> then the proper name of Brunellus seems to be that of a singular horse, and William's use of the name suggests an unexplained acquaintance with it. To Adso and the cellarer, this makes them leap immediately to the thought that William has some sort of transcendental access – access, perhaps, to the realm of names and the Word. He has, in a way:

“My good Adso,” my master said, “during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that

*omnis mundi creatura  
quasi liber et picture  
nobis est in speculum*<sup>134</sup>

and he was thinking of the endless array of symbols with which God, through His creatures, speaks to us of the eternal life. But the universe is even more talkative than

---

<sup>132</sup> Eco 1984: 24-5, with some omissions.

<sup>133</sup> Eco 1984: 112-113

<sup>134</sup> *The whole world of creatures / [is] like a book and picture / [in which] we are mirrored*

Alanus thought, and it speaks not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion) but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly.<sup>135</sup>

Closer things: escaped horses and the deaths of monks. (We will return to the nature of actions and events later.) William's grasp of the 'easy', visible details allows his mind to move to other details. What does his mind move *through*? How does he get from one visible detail to another unseen? Later he confesses that the final step from his reasoning to the horse's mouth was completed with confidence:

Only when you are at the proper distance will you see that it is Brunellus (or, rather, that horse and not another, however you decide to call it). So an hour ago I could expect all horses, but not because of the vastness of my intellect, but because of the paucity of my deduction. And my intellect's hunger was sated only when I saw the single horse that the monks were leading by the halter.<sup>136</sup>

Part of the intermediate knowledge (if 'knowledge' is the right word – not something we will fix on here) which the novice and the cellarer find impressive and mysterious consists in William's precision with his own ignorance, his careful progression in the light of new information; and finally, the horse itself. Yet, there is still a question about *what* lets William do this. Saying that he is clever or perceptive or imaginative or wise is to obfuscate. William explains himself more exactly:

True, that kind of print expressed to me, if you like, the idea of 'horse,' the verbum mentis, and would have expressed the same to me wherever I might have found it. But the print in that place and at that hour of the day told me that at least one of all possible horses had passed that way. So I found myself halfway between the

---

<sup>135</sup> Eco 1984: 23-4

<sup>136</sup> Eco 1984: 28, direct speech; speech marks removed.

perception of the concept ‘horse’ and the knowledge of an individual horse. And in any case, what I knew of the universal horse had been given me by those traces, which were singular. I could say I was caught at that moment between the singularity of the traces and my ignorance, which assumed the quite diaphanous form of a universal idea.<sup>137</sup>

William is impressed by the singular and particular. He treats the universal idea of ‘horse’, which he does not deny comes to mind given the hoofmarks, as the sign of ‘all possible horses’, not as the *equus* of a reality transcending this one. ‘Horse’ does not name anything, it simply restricts the field to a possible range.<sup>138</sup> This range is to be restricted by further considerations. First of is the singularity of the hoofmarks in time and place, which tells him at least one particular horse has passed. Only when the noble Brunellus is presented is the tension of his thinking broken, for until then William is ‘halfway’ between ‘horse’ and Brunellus. Neither heaven nor earth, and yet this intermediate knowledge has to be supported by something. He is familiar with the possibility of horses from other encounters, so he has the *verbum mentis*; this possibility *now* and *here* is modified by other, singular ‘traces’, but the direct object of this thought remains a matter of lower, ‘closer’ possibility.

William uses his intermediate knowledge, awash with possibilities, to get at the singular and actual. Closer things: the cause of deaths, the – *this* – horse. Nevertheless, the

---

<sup>137</sup> Eco 1984: 27-8, direct speech. *Verbum mentis* = ‘mental word’, ‘concept’ or perhaps now ‘intensional object’.

<sup>138</sup> It is not only medieval logicians like Buridan who have been puzzled by the concept ‘horse’. Frege once insisted that *horse* is not a concept because it cannot be held to name the objects it apparently refers to (horses). Frege’s position has continued to be disputed; see Price 2016. We need to avoid this debate here; but the ‘intermediate’ position of Brother William seems to solve the problem: concepts do not need to refer to reality, *pace* Frege, they introduce constraints on possibilities. The scope of the constraint varies depending on the context and the technicality of Price-type solutions can be passed by – which is convenient here because otherwise we might get pulled into the philosophical Charybdis. Concepts, of course, must function in statements: see IV.20, below, for a theory of statements as introducing conditions to historiographical texts, each of which establishes a vector (or, for von Knies, *ein Spielraum* – see Heidelberg 2001 and above) of possibilities.



instrument of his discoveries is only indirectly his vision, sustained by his reading glasses (so unfamiliar to the other monks); and his Baconian description via Alanus of nature as book, picture, and mirror is only metaphorical. The things he sees in them are not as easily seen as the visible things first encountered by an ethnographer in Chan Kom or a young monk exalting in the churchly geometry of a community. It is his competence with possibilities which lets William read the signs. In the historiography of societies contemporary with William, in *Montaillou*, the horse never arrives, and so one seems to be left with the ‘traces’ alone and whatever one can make of them; it is perhaps this which explains the coldness in LeRoy Ladurie’s sense that for us the historical Montaillou and the spirit of Catharism ‘is nothing but a dead star’ emitting a ‘fascinating and cold light’.<sup>139</sup> We never quite get the ‘direct view’ he expects from treating Fournier as an ethnographer (see what Burke says, below). Nonetheless, still available is the sort of imagination or knowledge which William wields so skilfully to move from actual details, to a range of possibilities, and then back to new details which begin life as mere expectations. Obviously, this relies on the absence of the horse, at least in the first phase. Here we will be subjecting *Montaillou* to a second and thankfully merely literary and logical inquisition. It will be aimed at constructing and testing the thought that the sort of imaginative product LeRoy Ladurie delivers hangs in the intermediate state described by Brother William – in that realm of possibilities between the ignorance of heaven’s mere words and what the dualist Cathars would have thought the debasing world of particular, visible matters.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 625. Cf. Weis 2000: xxx.

<sup>140</sup> See Nelli 1978.

## 10. Post-Montailou

For both Redfield and Brother William, the visible serves as a starting point. From there, William shapes his view of the world of possibility in which further details might be added. Redfield though moves from what is visible to ‘systems’ – chain-like, map-like, radial and divine-contractual. Could it be that what Redfield calls ‘system’ relies on the same sort of intermediate judgements as William’s? Redfield’s ‘system’ is intermediate in its own way because it relates what is visible and present to what is, currently, not visible and (however reasonably) merely expected. This would be just like William’s acquaintance with the noble Brunellus were it not for the fact that what interests Redfield is the regularity of Chan Kom, and other small communities. The next step in the system is expected because it has been seen before.<sup>141</sup> Redfield’s effort is directed to the typicality of Chan Kom, whether this is revealed by the whole community which strikes one upon arrival, ecological systems, social structure, a typical biography, a kind of person, an outlook on life, a common history, sub-communities or a comprehensible set of conflicting elements.<sup>142</sup> LeRoy Ladurie includes all of these elements in *Montailou*. (Some of them will be examined in detail in coming pages.) He even begins in the same place as Redfield, with ecology and the environment of the Ariège, even if his conception of what this is nevertheless rather blurs into sociology.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Schütz 2013[1936-7]: 226 and the allusion there to Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* (2009 [1843]); for *possibilities*, see Kierkegaard 2009 [1843]: 30. Kierkegaard reflects, from a first-person perspective, about the possibilities available in a particular historical context, though his text requires sustained attention; his mode of personal reflection is too far removed from mine of historiographical and sociological theory to be of immediate use here.

<sup>142</sup> Redfield 1960: *passim*. The ‘environment’ is treated as including the local social and political ‘powers’ at work in Montailou; LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 26-50.

<sup>143</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: pt. 1.

This has raised criticisms. René Weis wrote *The Yellow Cross* in the wake of interest in *Montaillou*.<sup>144</sup> The title comes from the large sewn crosses Cathars were sometimes forced to wear as punishment, like a Star of David. Better than burning, perhaps, but the Bogumils and Cathars (between whom there is at least a resemblance and perhaps a relation – see below) had hated the cross as a symbol of the instrument of Christ’s murder.<sup>145</sup> *The Yellow Cross* is a collection of narratives set in the last years of the Cathars in the Pyrenes, 1290-1329. In a prefacial chapter entitled ‘Sources and Procedures’ – and, we might add, Justifications (for indulging in more stories about Montaillou) – Weis treats LeRoy Ladurie’s anthropological and sociological interests as a problem, one which vitiates its narrative re-writing. He does not quite say this, but he comes close here:

In *Montaillou*, LeRoy Ladurie provided trenchant analyses of the socio-economic politics of the Pay d’Aillou at the time of the d’Ablis and Appamanian Inquisitions. But his work on family, home, marriage and sex inevitably involved a degree of conceptual abstraction which submerged the individual in the tribe, when it is precisely the irreducibility of the men and women of the Registers which makes them address us with such freshness from those ancient pages. In what follows I have attempted to tease out the *story* of these events on the ground, to tell it as a narrative simultaneously from within and, to the extent that I write with hindsight, from without.<sup>146</sup>

Weis does not stop to ask whether there is something more to LeRoy Ladurie’s ‘trenchant analyses’ than at first appears. Nor does he ask about the purpose of his own, closer tracking of the easier and more visible (in the documents) things in the battery of

---

<sup>144</sup> For a discussion of further criticisms of *Montaillou* which are not to my present purpose see Yahil 2002.

<sup>145</sup> Davies 1991: 322

<sup>146</sup> Weis 2000: liii-liv

narratives which constitutes *The Yellow Cross*. It is something of a presumption that the visible courses of action he extracts from the same documents as LeRoy Ladurie stand on their own several feet as more interesting, more self-explanatory, more important or less reductive. Of course, none of this is to impugn the qualities of *The Yellow Cross*, which is full of readable stories about Cathars, except to say that it is much less inventive and provoking than *Montaillou*.<sup>147</sup>

If one relied on Weis' comments, one might think that the *inventio* of *Montaillou* consisted in doing away with individual action altogether to be replaced entirely by Redfield's anthropological interest in the whole and its abstract or systematic parts. This would also be very much *contra* Redfield, who insists on beginning with the visible and with its directly restraining one's theoretical positions. Yet, it is hard to flick through *Montaillou* without finding a page replete with italicized quotations from the Fournier register, embedded, it is true, in 'socio-economic analyses'. For example, one section of *Montaillou* devoted to *Structures sociables: femmes, hommes, jeunes* begins with the assertion that 'masculine sociability is more widespread than its feminine equivalent'.<sup>148</sup> A 'trenchant' socio-economic analysis? Perhaps. But the next pages consist almost entirely in narrated and directly quoted testimony between various men, articulating aspects of their sociability in detail:

More significant however is the quasi-municipal sociability which groups masculine elements of a locality, in the road, and above all in the village square, under common elms; on a Sunday, for example. It is the eternal *agora*, Christianised by the mass, of Mediterranean communities; one speaks there of women, and above all of religion. *This same year*, recounted Guillaume Austatz, the peasant and bayle of Orrolac, in

---

<sup>147</sup> Neither is it to suggest an acrimonious, academic dispute: LeRoy Ladurie wrote a celebratory preface for the French edition of Weis' book; see Weis 2016.

<sup>148</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 389

*1320, after we had burnt the heretic Raymond de la Côte, near Pamiers, six men from Ormolac were, on a certain Sunday, in the village square, near the elm; they spoke of the burning of the heretic; I went over and said to them:*  
*– I'll say this to you. That man we burnt was a good priest... Etc.*<sup>149</sup>

More direct speech follows under different elms, but perhaps what Weis objects to is the 'Etc.'. Certainly individuals are not ignored. It is more careful to ask what all the other elements in *Montaillou* are doing there in addition, more charitable to assume that LeRoy Ladurie, like William, was acquainted with William of Occam.<sup>150</sup> If *nothing* is to be added, then why not simply translate the Fournier Registers into English, as they had been into French by Jean Duvernoy in the 1960s, in time for *Montaillou*? Could it be that *Montaillou* in fact expands rather than reduces our familiarity with the people of Montaillou in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries by telling us more, and more systematically, about the historical world in which they lived? It may even come to be seen that the enlightening aspects of *The Yellow Cross* are basically the same as *Montaillou*, except that in what follows from Weis the action is the beginning and the 'system' follows:

When Fabrisse Rives spotted Guillaume Peyre in the *foghana* [kitchen-cum-dining room] of the house, she noticed him leaning on a cushion, and was struck by the lordly treatment afforded him by Alazais Rives. Alazais was decanting a 'broth' made from nuts in a bowl, while in a separate pot she was cooking cabbage and meat, presumably for her family and herself. Alazais also brought him a wooden basin, water, and a pristine napkin, and he washed his hands while she poured water over them. Then, putting clean napkins in front of him, she waited on him with great care. This clearly how Guillaume Peyre's master was used to being served, and Peyre perhaps saw

---

<sup>149</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 390

<sup>150</sup> Eco 1980: 91

himself already as a novitiate Perfect [Cathar religious]; but not long after he was to betray his friends.<sup>151</sup>

‘The deeper reasons for the Perfect’s diet will become clear when we hear Pierre and Jacques Authié preach’, Weis says. But what we learn is precisely the details of a ritual, generalizable beyond Pierre and Jacques. The speech and action which is adduced from the Registers to support this (which we have just sampled) is consequently stereotyped and perhaps, as Phillipe Carrard puts it in *Poetics of the New History*, somewhat ‘anonymous’ despite the names they are attached to:

These narratives, however, remain subordinated to the description that frames them. When singulative, they serve as examples. When iterative, they merge with the descriptive passage, from which they are sometimes indistinguishable because they both employ the same very tenses (present or imperfect). In brief, their objective is never to recount singular events that occurred in the lives of unique individuals; it is to tell what used to happen, what things were like for large groups of people. And these people, unlike the heroes of positivist historiography, remain mostly anonymous, only acquiring an identity as “cases of” or “instances of”.<sup>152</sup>

We know what an ‘example’ is; we have encountered one in LeRoy Ladurie’s passage on masculine sociability. By ‘iterative’, Carrard means some sort of sustained narrative, and his thought is that even these sustained examples are dominated, in the Annales School or “New” history he is discussing, by the analysis or Inquisition to which they are subject. The imperfect tense, in which a continuous activity is dated to the past, enters here through continuous and typical ‘cooking’ and ‘decanting’, the beginnings of a stereotyped activity. Perhaps it is this, and not merely the not unrelated ‘Etc.’, to

---

<sup>151</sup> Weis 2000: 105, my annotations

<sup>152</sup> Carrard 1992: 45, terminus added.

which Weis finds himself objecting. Yet, to the extent to which his own description of the ritual surrounding a (potential) Perfect's food includes some individuals, they are demonstrators of a regularity, and it fails to be clear what is more interesting: the ritual or its enactment on this occasion – the ritual, or the people who are described as doing it now. Even when his demonstrators are not repeating rituals or intoning fixed words, might they not still fail to appear as individuals, but as demonstrators of an unfamiliar world? Are we not always in fact looking past them at their world, of which they are only a part? It also fails to be clear which interest is the more naïve, given that seven-hundred years have passed: to pretend to be able to take an interest in people so different, whose lives include Cathar rituals as mere incidents; or to take the startling if stereotyped facts first, such as the willingness to be burnt at the stake for such rituals, acknowledging the distance. Part of the reason LeRoy Ladurie adopts an anthropological mood, partly from Redfield, is that he is concerned as much to represent the attempts of Montailou's inhabitants to live an ordinary and repetitive life as he is their interruption by hostile or external elements. Indeed, having read *Montailou*, one might be forgiven for thinking of the Inquisition as just another species of bad mountain weather. What interests LeRoy Ladurie more is the life it interrupts. As we shall see, LeRoy Ladurie chooses Pierre Maury, a shepherd, as the bearer of what he calls 'a pastoral philosophy', 'a philosophy of Montailou'.<sup>153</sup> This consists almost entirely in a commitment to the round of shepherding and transhumance to which he feels he is fated and which he follows *irregardless* of the dangers and temptations which pursue him.<sup>154</sup> There is, then, a certain fixity to the montalionalis life which is, at least sometimes, LeRoy Ladurie's preoccupation.

---

<sup>153</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190

<sup>154</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190-196

Let us return from Pierre Maury to the scholarly, briefly: in *The French Historical Revolution*, Peter Burke seemed to manage a high tone through which he could with equanimity criticize *Montaillou* in both directions, for generalizing too much and for not being individual enough, and then say all the same that the book was tremendous. First comes a denial of the author's claim to offer something like the direct view of the ethnographer:

It is of course nothing of the kind. The villagers gave their evidence in Occitan and it was taken down in Latin. They were not spontaneously taking about themselves, but replying to questions under threat of torture. Historians cannot afford to forget these intermediaries between themselves and the men and women they study.<sup>155</sup>

Is the problem that LeRoy Ladurie read the Registers in Latin not Occitan, or that he reported them in French? Either way, this is a rather precious criticism, principled rather than particular, given that no particular inaccuracies or distortions are adduced. A similar absence is found with Weis, but he has the excuse that he is getting on with his own book. That LeRoy Ladurie's sources were procured with torture looming, however, is more serious. Eco's William is an *ex-Inquisitor*, sceptical of the power of torture to render truth.

Here is not the place to get into the intrigues of testimony.<sup>156</sup> Yet, for all the discussion that might be had, there are, bluntly, three options which preserve *Montaillou*, even as the deliverance of torture. First, accept the power of torture; presumably *in extremis* one tries the truth at some point. Second, trust that LeRoy Ladurie is capable of sifting

---

<sup>155</sup> Burke 1990: 83; see also Rosaldo 1986: 97 *et passim* who worried about 'figures of domination' returning in the guise of the ethnographical-historian, LeRoy Ladurie. While his concerns about the objectivity of *Montaillou* probably resound, Rosaldo's moral overtones are tinny.

<sup>156</sup> For a related discussion, see Ricoeur 2004: 146-181



the performances from the honesties. Third, bracket *Montaillou* under the condition that its informing testimony is reliable *enough*. It does not matter which, but whichever it is, the quality of the testimony is not going to be examined in detail here. Burke fails to acknowledge that LeRoy Ladurie is aware of his problem of evidence and reconstruction:

The traces of psychology and *mentalité* which we can, however, glean something of and attribute to them [the montalionais] are necessarily fragmentary. The important thing, in these conditions, will be the power to represent in what way these men viewed the meaning of their life; and what consciousness they have of their identity. The response to this question of a pastoral philosophy, or even just a philosophy of *Montaillou*, is clear enough. It will be given to us, many times over, by Maury himself.<sup>157</sup>

At this point Maury expresses his most heretical thought, that he must carry his own destiny despite the temptations of a good marriage and the predations of the Inquisition, to shepherd around from *Montaillou* to Catalonia, neither the first nor the last heretic to insist that he can do no other. Yet, Maury is an outstandingly unique individual in *Montaillou*, and his capacity as unique to somehow typify LeRoy Ladurie's object of study makes Burke's second criticism equally hard to sustain, at least not in any simple way:

The second main criticism of the book – and of the increasingly popular microhistorical approach that it has helped to inspire – raises the question of typicality. No community is an island, not even a mountain village such as *Montaillou*. Its connections with the outside world, as far away as Catalonia, emerge clearly in the book itself. The question remains: What larger unit does the village represent? Of what ocean is it a drop? Is it supposed to be typical of the Ariège, the south of France, the Mediterranean world, or

---

<sup>157</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190. All quotations from *Montaillou* my translation.

the Middle Ages? Despite his previous experience with statistics and samples, the author fails to discuss this crucial problem of method. Could this be because he wrote *Montaillou* in reaction against the aridities of quantitative history?<sup>158</sup>

Burke presumes that typicality is a problem of method, and that this problem should be solved within the pages of *Montaillou* and not in a broader consideration of LeRoy Ladurie's writings. By contrast, in volume one of *Temps et récit*, Ricoeur takes it as granted that *Montaillou* is just one point in LeRoy Ladurie's repeated struggle with the nature of history.<sup>159</sup> Burke might be accused of ignoring this: LeRoy Ladurie's broader effort of thought in his own historiographical context.<sup>160</sup>

It is a shame that Burke did not pursue his own thought that the book was a reaction against quantitative history. What André Burgière calls 'The Labrousse Moment' in the 1950s and 1960s was certainly a hot, dry climactic for the *Annalistes*.<sup>161</sup> Burgière – an inheritor of the tradition he chronicles – suggests that the movement needed this dryness or distance, and the heat of technical rigour, in order to return to one of its characteristic concepts, *mentalité*.<sup>162</sup> This concept, indicating a historically specific shared, collective, or typical complex of mental attitudes, reveals the *Annales* School's roots in Durkheim and French sociology generally (Mauss, Simiand, later Gurvitch) and is another artefact of its close relationship with anthropology.<sup>163</sup> Burgière seems to think that the value of the concept could only be grasped, or recovered, against the background of a desert. *Montaillou* is perhaps typical of this: LeRoy Ladurie addresses the *mentalité* montalionalais directly as a feature in the 'ecology' of the region, and other

---

<sup>158</sup> Burke 1990: 83

<sup>159</sup> Ricoeur 1983: 199-200

<sup>160</sup> For an equally thin engagement with *Montaillou*, see Lloyd 1993.

<sup>161</sup> Burgière 2009: chp.5

<sup>162</sup> Burgière 2009: 103

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Redfield 1960: 81-95

elements in the text – discussions of the importance of the *domus*, Catharism itself, the particular outlook of individuals like Pierre Maury – add detail.<sup>164</sup>

What Burke fails to ask is what the Labrousse moment might have contributed *positively* to the Annales history which followed, like *Montaillou*. Burgière discusses the importance allotted to collective enquiry in this phase, and he describes how later this resulted in a flourishing of regional monographs:

Instead of using obstacles that every new case (period, region, or even new type of serial source) raises to the application of the model in order to move toward new questions and a more complex historical explanation, Labrousse's method saw ongoing research as a constant verification of the hypothesis posited from the start. That is why the author of the *Esquisse* favoured the monograph form, which he did not adopt in his own studies but which he imposed on his students, to the point of conceptualizing a true departmentalization of France's economic and social history for the contemporary (postrevolutionary) period. It thus allowed one to move from the example to the totality by means of accumulation.<sup>165</sup>

The idea that 'totality' might be achieved through 'accumulation' is an obscure proposition: if only we can collect enough information, we could see the meaning of history as a whole. Put that aside for a moment. A consequence of this 'total history' is that *examples* do not need generalizing, only accumulating as pieces of a picture. There need be no attempt to transform particulars into more general things except as a collator. They stand for themselves. In this respect the approach offers the same concern for particulars as William with Brunellus.

---

<sup>164</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: chps. VII, II. For Pierre Maury's 'philosophy': 190-196 and below.

<sup>165</sup> Burgière 2009: 129, some omissions.

Against this background, Burke's questions about 'typicality' seem to be asked as much of the *Annales* tradition as a whole as of *Montaillou* in particular. There is a clear line to be drawn to LeRoy Ladurie's early work. He began as a 'disciple' of Labrousse. *Les paysans du Languedoc* – his first book, derived from his doctoral thesis – took Labrousse's use of quantitative analysis of large series of data and added some Braudel-derived demography.<sup>166</sup> *Montaillou* comes after, and part of what LeRoy Ladurie announces at the beginning in claiming to take a 'direct view' is to be understood not only as a declaration of independence from the 'great syntheses', but also from his own earlier work. His turn towards anthropology is, of course, a turn away from Labrousse; but it can also be seen as his method for deepening the task of *monographie* Labrousse himself set. Burke's criticism concerning the 'typicality' of *Montaillou* (not discussed by Burgière) may be warranted all the same, but only as a question to be pursued with charity. It certainly raises a question which is by turns intellectual-historical and analytical. Did LeRoy Ladurie, in a trajectory leading away from Labrousse, in fact carry with him both a concern for 'monographie', and with it the principle of accumulation as opposed to generalization? A more analytical version might ask how *Montaillou* could be added to such a process of accumulation: what makes it *open* to being treated, like Pierre Maury, as a particular which exemplifies without being formally typical?<sup>167</sup> How is it a finished work without its having been closed-off with a series of statements about its final and more general significance?

'It is a matter,' William would tell us, 'of knowing whether there are sides and whether there is a whole.'<sup>168</sup> The question is: what are the limits? By what are they constituted? And how do we write about them? Whereas Adso begins at the abbey so impressed by

---

<sup>166</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1966; Burgière 2009: 135-6.

<sup>167</sup> Using this terminology here ('particular'), anticipates Leibniz and Ankersmit, discussed below; also see Fairbrother 2017.

<sup>168</sup> Eco 1984: 65

its self-evident, divinely geometrical wholeness, William knows that *various* features of the time and place constitute its limits, and they need probing. All are visible, but you have to know where to look. The Rule of St. Benedict and the geometry of the Audiforium may be calibrated to give the appearance of divine, transcendent order, and to draw the eye (away, perhaps?), but they are only some particular facts among others. To understand Chan Kom, the abbey, or Montaillou, or *Montaillou*, is to be familiar with their details; but it is harder to say what these details amount to. Burke says that

as in the case of the stone houses of the village itself, it is easy to pick holes in *Montaillou*. It deserves to be remembered above all for its author's power of bringing the past to life, and also for putting the documents to the question, reading them between the lines, and making them reveal what the villagers did not even know they knew. It is a brilliant *tour de force* of the historical imagination, and a revelation of the possibilities of an anthropological history.<sup>169</sup>

Perhaps we have seen that in fact the criticisms are not so easy – though neither is rebutting them. Burke discusses *Montaillou* as if it is the only book LeRoy Ladurie ever wrote, and as if his other books and the books of others do not constitute clues about what the *acceptable* limitations of his most famous book are. Burke's *praise* is equally unpursued: he seems to have the idea that *Montaillou* is tremendously vivid, and that its interest lies in being a work of the imagination – of going beyond the facts. But he does not ask any further, like Adso confronted by Redfield's 'intuited whole' of the abbey, and where we might go *beyond the apparent facts* is unseen. This is the dimension of *Montaillou* which we will pursue in the rest of this study: my thought will be that *all* the elements out of which it is built – whether they resemble more William's *événementiel* encounter with Brunellus or Redfield's chains, maps, radii and contracts –

---

<sup>169</sup> Burke 1990: 83

are ways of grasping visible traces *as* coordinates of specific, worldly possibilities for action. These possibilities define a historically specific context. Part of the work later will be to explain how some of these coordinates function in detail, because by itself this general idea about possibilities signifies nothing – as promising or as unpromising as it might sound. However, first further commentaries are required to take us closer to the details of what is being proposed here about possibility and of the specific contribution of *Montaillou* to what in 1975 was already a flourishing field of Cathar studies.

## **11. Pre-*Montaillou***

The Cathars, also called ‘Albigensians’ (in virtue of their relationship with the town of Albi), were dualists marked as heretics by the Catholic authorities. They called themselves *boni homines*, *bone femine*, *bons omes*, and *bonas femnas*.<sup>170</sup> Their particular heresy had been determined ‘treason against God’ by Pope Innocent III in 1199. This enabled the Crusade against them, a strategy usually reserved for Muslim infidels in the Holy Land. From 1209-29, the Albigensian Crusade assaulted Cathars in Languedoc with the same formal dispensations as if it were a province of Islam, with Innocent III allowing ‘the remission of sins and unrestricted loot’.<sup>171</sup> For the first nine years, twelve-thousand knights under Simon de Montfort the Elder crusaded under papal authority. The French Kingdom joined them from 1225-71, hemming-in the Cathars and consolidating France beyond the confines of the Île de France. The Albigensian Crusade was supplement by a Holy Inquisition led by Robert the Bugger, who for some time had been thought of as a Cathar heretic himself. The Inquisition was a legalistic if violent form of local, religious administration, requiring a certain control

---

<sup>170</sup> Pegg 2001: 191

<sup>171</sup> Davies 1991: 362; cf. Lambert 1998: 92-111.

of the territory. But the Crusade was primarily an expansionist military action, driven by the knightly ethos of the monastery, and it achieved victories. At times, Innocent III noticed the power of preaching over killing.<sup>172</sup> However, the bloody crowning glory was the razing of Montségur in 1244: holy site and entrenched mountain hide-out of the Cathars, its defeat wrecked a crucial node in the network, driving all but those two-hundred executed in a mass burning underground, or further into the mountains. Gordon Leff claims that the last Cathar in France, one Limosus Niger, was burned in 1326 but, although Catharism certainly recedes as an open force from this point, such an ending is probably too neat and perhaps we ought to assume a continuing influence, however subterranean.<sup>173</sup> Solange Deyon notes that the Inquistorial records continue until 1329, suggesting at least the Pamier Church's continuing concerns, and though 'various measures show it at the level of extinction' by this date, 'it is,' nonetheless, 'difficult to know what became of catharism'.<sup>174</sup>

The final open years of the *bonnes hommes*, covered by LeRoy Ladurie up to 1324, saw them needing to draw increasingly sharp lines between safe and inclement territory. Catalonia remained a refuge in the West, to which various Cathar faithfuls in *Montaillou* retreated as Fournier's Inquisition at Pamier lingered behind the Crusade. Lombardy, to the East, was another commonly sought haven, and moreover one which took followers in the direction of the possible (if hazy<sup>175</sup>) origins of their dualist faith:

---

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Lambert 1998: 105

<sup>173</sup> Leff 1967: 450; for a historiography of the early years of the Cathars contemporary to LeRoy Ladurie, see Griffe 1969 and 1971; esp. 1971: chp.1 for a précis of sources such as the Registers of Jacques Fournier and *La chanson de la Croisade albigeoise*, the latter an Occitan text translated into French and only recently English.

<sup>174</sup> Deyon 2000: 134

<sup>175</sup> See Pegg 2001.

They believed that the prevalence of evil contradicted the existence of a sole benign Creator; that good and evil, therefore, must be separate creations. They were vegetarian [but ideally of course, and excepting fish], ascetic, puritanical; they practiced the equality of men and women; and they supported a caste of *perfecti* who administered the rite of *consolamentum*, the ‘laying on of hands’.<sup>176</sup>

Robert the Bugger’s inglorious nomenclature points past Lombardy to the “Cathars” further east and other groups in Bulgaria (*Bu[l]gger-ia*) who were treated as identically heretical by the Church. It was the Bogumilist dualist’s celibacy and habit of travelling in pairs, presumably for protection not sex, which raised suspicions about their proclivities. On the contrary, the Cathar Pierre Clergue of Montailou was a notorious womaniser who repeated previous dualist’s inversions to claim that as all sex is sinful, the worst sins – adultery, incest – are the best because at least then the sinner is conscious of sinning.<sup>177</sup> Dualists in previous centuries ‘following the preacher Theodosius, indulged in orgies, deliberately experiencing sin to qualify for repentance’.<sup>178</sup>

The medieval root of all this in the deeper history of the Cathars may have been Bogumil, a dualist Bulgarian priest. Similar heresies spread West through Christendom, and what the Church identified as Catharism was thus to be found through Bulgaria, Bosnia, Southern Germany, Italy, the Languedoc and Catalonia.<sup>179</sup> Bogumil sustained the classical traditions of Paulicians, non-Christian Manicheans and Gnostics, which his followers elaborated with a distinctly medieval flare for world-rejection, inversion, self-

---

<sup>176</sup> Davies 1991: 362

<sup>177</sup> See LeRoy Ladurie 1975: chps. III and VIII.

<sup>178</sup> Davies 1991: 322

<sup>179</sup> For Bosnia, see Lambert 1998: 107-8 and Malcom 2002, esp. 27-42 for the formation of the Bosnian church.



chastisement, and not least of all nudism.<sup>180</sup> Yet their ideas also sought to penetrate the obscurities of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, rejecting not only the world but miracles, Sacraments, icons, the liturgy – in short, all the artefacts of churchly order. They also reinterpreted the immaculate conception in symbolic terms, having God whisper to Mary, predicting her encounter with the already-born infant Jesus in a cave rather than planting him in her.<sup>181</sup> This might have disappointed Pierre Clergue, as we shall see; but the elements in Bogumilism, and later Catharism, made it apt as an ideological support for resistance against the all-too-human authorities of the Papacy and the proto-national kingdoms clustering nervously around it.<sup>182</sup>

A note of caution is of course required in any discussion of origins: as Malcom warns for Bogumilism in the Bosnian context, positing connections between heresies can be done to support various national and theological causes.<sup>183</sup> Pegg has attempted to unmask the unhistorical ‘Edwardian historiographic stillness’ pervading previous studies of the “Cathars” in France, insisting that resemblances should not be confused for relations.<sup>184</sup> The Roman Church could paint heretics, either in the Pyrenees or on the Dalmatian coast, as unchristian Manicheans. It is from their records much of our knowledge of the Cathars is drawn. Some of the wilder stories may derive from pious Catholic exaggeration. But heretical continuities can also be drawn into bolstering national (Serb, Croat) and, as Deyon notes, *regional* identities.<sup>185</sup> In France, the Cathars

---

<sup>180</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Davies 1991: 322

<sup>182</sup> 1215, the height of the Albigensian Crusade, is remembered in modern Britain as the year of *Magna Carta* and thus in some ways as the birth of constitutionally modern England; but King John (Lackland or ‘Softsword’), in the same year, was forced in the wake of the defeat at Bouvines (1214) to reduce England to something like a ‘vassal’ of Rome; Davies 1991: 360. The ‘state’ is almost absent from Montaillou, and putting questions of state aside may have been one reason for LeRoy Ladurie’s choice of topic; cf. Burgière 2009: 144.

<sup>183</sup> Malcom 2002: 27ff

<sup>184</sup> Pegg 2001: 195

<sup>185</sup> Deyon 2000: 135-137

of Montaignou can serve both the Midi and the Catalans/Occitans against a colder, “centralized” Nord.<sup>186</sup> We can continue to use the term ‘Cathar’, but only with these warnings in mind.

Catharism was not a proto-Protestantism; but its anti-clericalism, relative gender equality (remember Friar Luther’s nun-wife), and encouragement of an individualist faith certainly bears some resemblances. They would be anathema to each other, of course. It is also one of the many examples of an anti-hierarchical theology joining hands with some sort of populist movement, charted so passionately for a later era in a darker, wetter place by EP Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*.<sup>187</sup> Though dealing with different historical periods in different countries, Thompson and LeRoy Ladurie both contributed to a newly vigorous interest in the theology of resistance movements in the 1960s and 70s, Thompson in the full grip of Marxism. The thirteenth-century church itself was over-familiar with resistance couched in theology. Its wealth provoked a lauding of poverty, not least in St. Francis of Assisi.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, it was partly to stave-off a chaos of various heretics and spontaneously ascetic lay-movements that it conceived formal orders devoted to poverty, like the Franciscans and Poor Clares, inverted caricatures of the decadent church itself. In one sense, the orders collected men (and others women) like the Cathar *perfecti* back to the church, to be ruled and surveilled. Poverty may not in fact have been a requirement of Catharism, but it certainly attracted a range of outcasts and marginals, as well as the châtelaines, counts and bailiffs of a recalcitrant local aristocracy.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> Deyon 2000: 137; see also Sévilla 2006, who claims to unmask this as Romanticism in the name of accurate history – though himself clearly in a nationalist, Republican cause.

<sup>187</sup> Thompson 1980

<sup>188</sup> See Vauchez 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Leff 1967: 451; LeRoy Ladurie 1975: *passim*, esp. XXV; cf. Davies 1991: 322.

In treating the later years of the Cathars in the Pyrenees, *Montaillou* was a work of cutting edge historiography in the great Annales tradition, open to international influences like Anglophone anthropology and contemporary populist Leftism; but it also relied on a previous and more provincial generation's quieter forays into the apparent freedoms of the Pyrenean Cathars' mountain air. Apart from the 'great syntheses' of general French history mentioned by LeRoy Ladurie in the first lines of *Montaillou*, many previous studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries specifically of the Cathars had tended to sway in one of three directions. Some – like Soderberg's *La religion des cathares* of 1949 – took religion as a focus, with the Cathars featuring as an example in the more general history of Inquisitions and heresy. Others caught the topic in a more traditionally historical net, for instance with Phillipe Wolf's economic history *Commerce et marchands de Toulouse* of 1954. Major features in LeRoy Ladurie's bibliography are the works of Duvernoy (translator of the Fournier Registers but a historian in his own right), Thouzellier, and Vidal, all patient readers of the documents.<sup>190</sup> Others hint at what Burgière cautions might have been 'folklorism', such as A Moulis: 'that erudite from the Ariège, so well informed about regional folklore, [who] has given us various pamphlets' like *Traditions... de mon terroir* of 1972, mostly published in the previous decade.<sup>191</sup> Only one title indicates a prior specific interest in *Montaillou* itself, *Montaillou d'après Jacques Fournier*, one B Pierry's doctoral dissertation, accepted at the University of Toulouse in 1969 under the supervision of a G Caster. Everything hints at strong prior interest – in the period, the place, and its mythology – but nothing predicts LeRoy Ladurie's melding of Annales history, local history, and classical (Mauss, Toennies, Weber, Durkheim, Pitt-Rivers) and contemporary (Redfield, Gellner, Hajnal, Goody, Tilly, Levi-Strauss) anthropology and sociology.

---

<sup>190</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 629-640

<sup>191</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 637; Burgière 2009: 142; cf. Sévilla 2006: chp. 4.

One might deepen such a commentary on the context of *Montaillou* in the manner of Quentin Skinner's contextualism, where a significant text is interpreted through its context of contemporaries.<sup>192</sup> This would mean treating it as an object lesson in the intellectual history of the high 1970s.<sup>193</sup> LeRoy Ladurie ends the *Avant-propos* and begins the book proper by saying '[s]o we have Montaillou, in itself and for itself, along the lines of Jacques Fournier's inquiries; I have simply regrouped and reorganized them in the spirit of a village *monographie*'.<sup>194</sup> Thus he acknowledges dependence on his historiographical context. The Hegelese is a symptom of his claim to be doing ethnography, to be at least partly entering into the peasants own grasp of their world. The 'regrouping', which elsewhere Walsh called 'colligation',<sup>195</sup> is clearly affected by the social science I have mentioned, not least Redfield's *The Little Community*; but it also answers to the previous generation's historiography of the Cathars by offering a monographical synthesis and pushing the weight of interest away from Montségur (1244) and the Crusades against them (1199 onwards) toward the Cathars' latter years after 1294.

Further, one might compare *Montaillou* with comparably synthetic works like René Nelli's *La vie quotidienne des Cathares du Languedoc au XIIIe siècle*, which in 1969 even ventured a short statement on the 'mentalité' of the Cathar peasant which bears some resemblances to LeRoy Ladurie's own more extensive picture.<sup>196</sup> The influence

---

<sup>192</sup> One might also broaden the discussion beyond *Montaillou* given LeRoy Ladurie's returns to both small-scale history and peasant history in *Le Carnaval de Romans* and *The Beggar and the Professor* – and other works; see LeRoy Ladurie 1979 and 1997. See Yahil 2002: 153<sup>n.18</sup> for a list of LeRoy Ladurie's books available in English translation.

<sup>193</sup> See Skinner 2002.

<sup>194</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 21

<sup>195</sup> Walsh 1974: *passim* esp. 133-144

<sup>196</sup> Nelli 1969: 136-7

of the Annales School, proprietors of the concept of ‘mentalité’, may have seeped into Cathar studies before LeRoy Ladurie. To this extent, Skinner’s contextualism might help us study LeRoy Ladurie’s use of his context, and this would be desirable in a fuller study of *Montaillou an sich*, as it were. However, the narrower and yet in a different way broader and more analytical approach adopted here will involve isolating elements of LeRoy Ladurie’s text itself, asking how they fit and function together, with more than half an eye on the broader issue of the role of possibilities in history. LeRoy Ladurie had the same documents available as everyone else at the time; what makes his book stand-out is precisely the blending of elements, which to be understood needs to be analysed, as Redfield said about cultures. To what extent are there sides to LeRoy Ladurie’s construction, and do they make a whole?

*Montaillou* is rather long (close to six-hundred and fifty pages), and contains a varied battery of different ways in which LeRoy Ladurie tries to convey the Montaillou of the period. He is still ‘trying his luck’ at ‘total history’, albeit on a much smaller scale than most of the Annalists.<sup>197</sup> In one sense, the book itself is its own analysis, just as Merleau-Ponty says that everything one sees is a ‘diagram’ of the visible and of one’s vision.<sup>198</sup> Profound, perhaps – but not useful. Merleau-Ponty also says that in painting the figure ‘*must* be deformed, the square into a diamond, the circle into an oval, to represent the object’.<sup>199</sup> To say anything general about possibility in *Montaillou* means having a distorted but detailed representation of it to work on, abridged and exaggerated, and shaped by our interests and point of view. This is what we shall now turn to construct. (We will return to Merleau-Ponty later.)

---

<sup>197</sup> Cf. LeRoy Ladurie quoted in Burgière 2009: 135.

<sup>198</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 28

<sup>199</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 39.

## 12. *Montaillou*

Weis' idea that the people in *Montaillou* are submerged in LeRoy Ladurie's 'trenchant socio-economic analyses' can be investigated both as a straightforward claim about the construction of the text or, alternatively, as a judgement about its overall effect. The first version of Weis' idea is fully accurate in so far as people and actions are treated as examples, sometimes in briefly extended stories (often in direct speech or testimony). Yet, as I suggested above, this ignores the possibility that the people of *Montaillou* and their action might be best grasped through a broader consideration of their world. We will consider eventually that understanding these people consists in grasping their possibilities in various ways, and Weis' careful stories are only one way of doing this. Accordingly, understanding *Montaillou* will consist in grasping how it conveys these possibilities through what Weis dismisses as 'trenchant socio-economic analyses'. We need a more manageable reduction of *Montaillou* to work on which will let us show how people and their actions fit into it in detail. As it happens, two characters in particular, and their actions, correspond to two of the most significant *loci* or 'cells [*cellules*]' of montalionalis life, both of which have intimate dealings with Catharism, the Inquisition, and the limits of their existence in the mountains forming the Ariège valley.<sup>200</sup> Neither is a direct representative of a type – apart from being two 'Pierre's among many – but each is in his own way demonstrative of the same wider world. Each is in his own way perverse, one sexually and the other in the hardships of itinerancy he was willing to endure. The logical place of each vis-à-vis montalionalis society might therefore be described in the same terms as Hegel describes Diogenes, the excremental man of the barrel:

---

<sup>200</sup> For *cellule*, LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 51.

Addition (H): Diogenes, in his whole character as a Cynic, is in fact merely a product of the social life of Athens, and what determined him was the opinion against which his entire way of life reacted. His way of life was therefore not independent, but merely a consequence of these social conditions, and itself an unprepossessing product of luxury. Where, on one hand, luxury is at its height, want and depravity are equally great on the other, and Cynicism is then evoked by the opposite extreme of refinement.<sup>201</sup>

From a singular ‘social condition’, Hegel says, ‘an indeterminate multiplication and specification of needs, means, and pleasures’ can arise.<sup>202</sup> In short, different characters or personalities. The personalities of a certain historical-social condition develop without regard for the difference between what might be natural and what acculturated; but their inner life comes up against the restrictions of an outer world dominated by practicalities which are determined at least partly by the ‘free will [of others]’.<sup>203</sup> These personalities will be of a range which is extensive but not entirely open. ‘What the English call ‘comfortable’ is inexhaustible’. But it never includes living in one’s own excrement in a barrel (as much as such a condition might nonetheless stand for certain varieties of English nationalism). What *all* the English in 1821, when Hegel published the *Elements*, have in common is a disjunction from the world of Athens, the influence of the classical world on the Georgians notwithstanding.<sup>204</sup> Each personality, then,

---

<sup>201</sup> Hegel 1991 [1821]: 231 (§195). Here Hegel states, less famously but with more precision, what became Marx’s thought in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte* – the first word of which is indeed ‘Hegel’ – that man makes his own history, but not in circumstances of his own choosing; Marx 1994: 188.

<sup>202</sup> Hegel 1991 [1821]: 231 (§195)

<sup>203</sup> Hegel 1991 [1821]: 231 (§195). One might think that there are natural conditions too, not just social or historical ones; but Hegel thinks that ‘[r]ivers are *not natural boundaries*’; op. cit. 268 (§247).

<sup>204</sup> Hegel 1991 [1821]: 229 (§191); cf. Hegel 1991 [1821]: 372-380 (§§341-360) where the action of world historical individuals – cutting-edge people in cutting-edge societies – pushes history forwards, as in ‘the right of heroes to establish states’ (§350). Neither of the Pierres can be said to be ‘world historical’.

might have something of the society of which it is a ‘product’ read back into it; but how? Let us consider two examples from *Montaillou*.

Pierre Maury (mentioned briefly above) is a shepherd, and consequently he spends much of his time in *cabanes*, seasonal camps in the mountains devoted to joint – but not collective – shepherding and cheese-making. Pierre Clergue is a Catholic priest who is, underneath his frock, a Cathar, and the dominant member of *the* preeminent *domus* (house/family) in Montaillou. LeRoy Ladurie represents Pierre Maury as almost being defined in himself by his life of transhumant shepherding. Pierre Clergue seems rather to defy any simple definition; but his characteristic activities seem to have been lying to the Church and having as much sex as possible – on religious grounds: he justifies adultery theologically, and at least once he does it in a church. Pierre Maury and Pierre Clergue in these ways represent two poles of *Montaillou*, one the mobile *cabanes*, the other the settled *domūs*.<sup>205</sup> By restricting ourselves to them, we can approach *Montaillou* in the form of two Russian dolls: Pierre Maury/his actions/his character/*cabanes* /village-mountain and Pierre Clergue/*his* action/his character/*domūs*/village-mountain. We can try putting these parts together to work out whether there are sides and if there is a whole; but first we need to see how they are integrated into LeRoy Ladurie’s text.

---

<sup>205</sup> Rosaldo 1986: 78-9 is sensitive to this but Froeyman 2016: chp. 6 errs in treating Pierre Clergue straightforwardly as *Montaillou*’s main character. I might have chosen further personalities to illustrate other aspects of the montalionalis world: Beatrice de Planisolles, for instance, represents the local aristocracy, women, the castle – and not just another of Clergue’s conquests. Clergue and Maury do represent useful expository extremes, however. Anne Brenon has discussed Cathar women at length; see Brenon 2005.



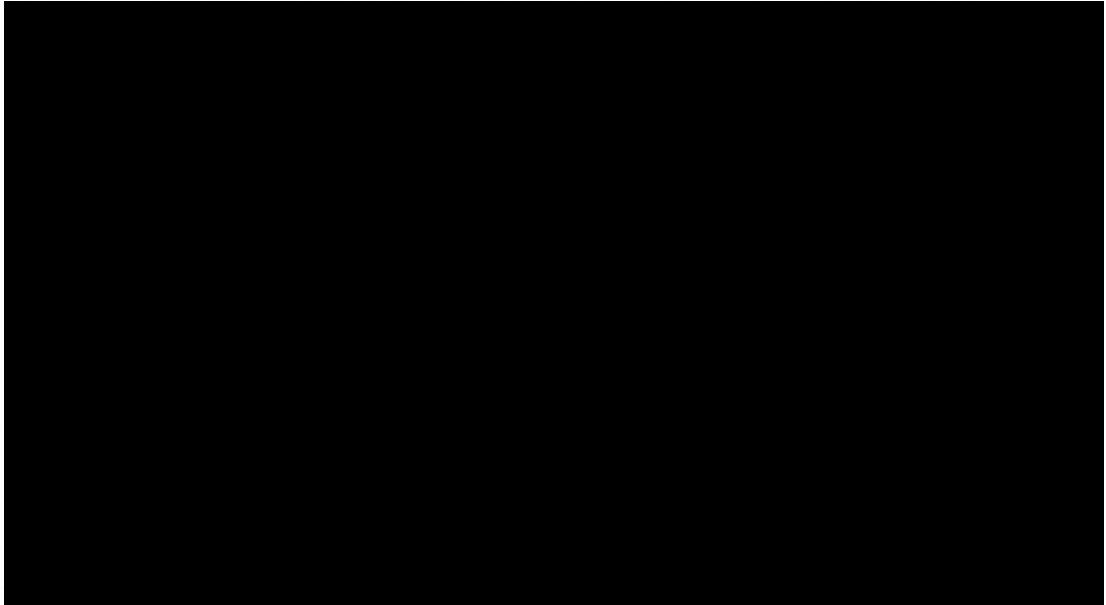


Figure 2: photograph of Montailou castle from *Montailou*.

### 13. Pierre Clergue

As one extreme personality might summarize a society, so an extreme action or habit might summarize a man or provide clues about his broader life. We begin again with the visible. Pierre Clergue was a rapist. This is the testimony of Graziade Rives recorded by Jacques Fournier:

*Seven years ago or thereabouts, in the summer, the curé<sup>206</sup> Pierre Clergue came to the my mother's house who was at the harvest, and he seemed really pushy:  
– Let me know you carnally.  
And me, I said to him:*

---

<sup>206</sup> French: *Parish priest*

– *Alright.*

*I was a virgin then. I think I was fourteen or fifteen. He had me in the barn where we keep the straw.*

LeRoy Ladurie takes this directly from the Fournier Register (hence the italics). In her retrospective testimony, Grazide denies that it was rape.<sup>207</sup> However, I will treat it as such in view of her age and her subjection to the power of Clergue. The testimony and the exploitation deepens:

*After that, he continued to know me carnally until the following January. He always did it in my mother's ostal<sup>208</sup>; she was present and consenting. The thing happened during the day, primarily.*

*After that, in January, the curé gave me to be married to my husband Pierre Lizier; and after he had thus given me to this man, the priest continued to know me carnally often, during the four year when I stayed living with my husband. And he was present and consenting. Sometimes my husband asked me:*

*– Has the priest done it with you?*

*And I responded:*

*– Yes.*

*And my husband said to me:*

*– What involves that priest, fine! But keep yourself well from other men.*

*However the priest never let himself know me carnally when my husband was in the house. He never brought it up except when he was out.<sup>209</sup>*

---

<sup>207</sup> *Cependant il ne s'agissait nullement d'un viol* (Grazide Rives); LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227. A reader who prefers another, perhaps more nuanced description can read this into the formal point I make below (V) when I return to 'The Rape of Grazide Rives'.

<sup>208</sup> Occitan: *home*

<sup>209</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227-8

Perhaps the priest's relative circumspection in this final regard shows his theology straining against more a more instinctive sense of intermale relations. His purpose is not quite blessed enough to ignore the husband's presence, however accepting. It is, however, the view from below which will show us the real strains of power in Montaillou. Grazide Rives' mother, Fabrisse Rives, had previously attempted to chastise Pierre Clergue for the sin of sleeping with a married woman. Pierre Clergue responded with exquisite dualism that *the sin [of sex] is the same, married or not; which is as much as to say that there's no sin at all.*<sup>210</sup> 'Everything is possible and everything is permitted' in a world of sin.<sup>211</sup> Nevertheless, despite her misgivings, Fabrisse Rives acquiesced in Pierre Clergue's regular exploitation of her daughter. LeRoy Ladurie treats this as hypocrisy; but he might instead have seen it as confirming his generalization (which we will get to) that it is the family which counted first in Montaillou. Fabrisse Rives' daughter was not married, and her husband's later behaviour demonstrates that regular abuse by a priest was no bar to becoming so. The mother later declined to testify against Pierre Clergue and his brothers (Bernard, the bailiff, and the yobbish Guillaume) for fear of being abused by them herself.<sup>212</sup> Her motherhood was washed over, but not fully *away*, by the powers of another family. It makes for an appalling lesson in the realities of interpersonal power in Montaillou, through the predations of its senior religious of both faiths. Better, perhaps, he had contented himself in a barrel. However, this short story is made complicated by Grazide Rives' later testimony that, at some point, she began to enjoy Clergue's visits, and the very possibility of this pleasure confronts us with a historical-sociological puzzle to which we will return (in V).<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227: *Le péché est le même, mariée ou pas. Autant dire qu'il n'y a pas de péché du tout.*

<sup>211</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227

<sup>212</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 229

<sup>213</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 228

Pierre Clergue was the dominant male in the dominant household in Montaillou, sometime lover of Beatrice de Planisolles (châtelaine of Montaillou<sup>214</sup>), representative of the church *and* heresy, described by LeRoy Ladurie as an adversary equal to the local Inquisitor Jacques Fournier who later became Pope Benôit VIII. His connections and powers were many, but let us separate one among these: his position in the house of Clergue, which, as LeRoy Ladurie puts it, was the ‘crossroads of all these networks’.<sup>215</sup> LeRoy Ladurie places the house of Clergue among other families:

There exists in Montaillou a stratification, socio-economic, of the *domūs*. We find some houses relatively well-off, rich indeed (Benet, Belot, and Clergue), and poor houses, at least known as such (Maury, Baille, Testanière, Pellisier, some of the Martyrs). The latter probably formed an important minority in the village. In the absence of a census statistics are difficult; however various texts have suggested that between the misfortune of a destitute man and the most opulent (non-noble) *ostal* in the parish (the house of Clergue), the ratio would be in the order of one to fifty. The well-off (everything is relative! [quite as Hegel says for England]) could own 8 to 10 hectares of fields and pasture per *domus*; the poor, one or two hectares; or less. These differences did not stop sociable communication between one pole and another; but at one time or another they made them bitter – even the absence, internally, of true class conflict.<sup>216</sup>

The Rives were poor relations of the house of Clergue, and this proximity in weakness is what let Pierre Clergue rape Grazide Rives repeatedly and what kept her mother Fabrisse quiet – as well as her husband Pierre Lizier. It also deepens the sense in which

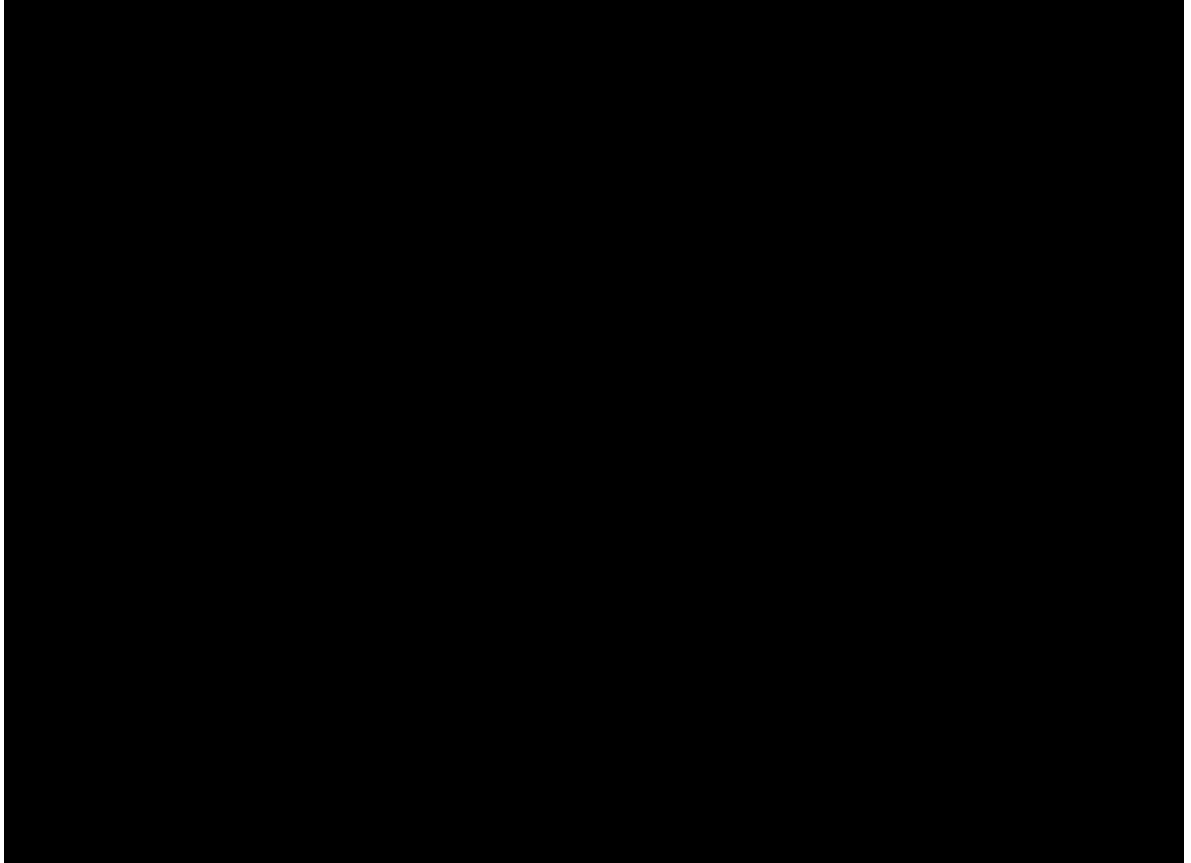
---

<sup>214</sup> Minor nobility, based at the castle.

<sup>215</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 103; cf. 91.

<sup>216</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 88

Pierre Clergue was a Diogenes in Hegel's sense, because the family/household system (figure 3, below) was in fact the main *locus* of value in Montaillou. Both Diogenes and



Pierre Clergue found ways to rattle the chains of their respective societies, and though probably neither is a 'world historical individual' in Hegel's terms, both through their extremity seem to have achieved part of the legacy Hegel says such an individual is likely to: '[t]hey receive no honour or thanks on its account, either from their contemporaries or from the public opinion of future generations; all that they are accorded by this opinion is *undying fame*'.<sup>217</sup> Or petty notoriety.

---

<sup>217</sup> Hegel 1991: 375 (§348); cf. Bataille 1991 for the more extreme example of Gilles de Rais.

Pierre Clergue, however, was a real power locally. LeRoy Ladurie describes the rape of Graziade Rives *after* having established the rapist as the headman of the Clergues. Pierre dominates both his brothers, Bernard (the bailiff) and Guillaume (a less theological rapist). Pierre's individual indulgences are the *visible* symptoms of a situation which LeRoy Ladurie has described in more general terms first, and it is this which gives succour to Weis' complaint and which Carrard says reduces the telling of this sort of action to mere example-giving (see 'Post-Montaillou'). On the contrary, though LeRoy Ladurie certainly generalizes, the picture is built-up more gradually than these complaints suggest. In a moment we will see how he accounts in more detail for the terms '*domus*', and '*ostal*' – both combine family, home, ancestors and hearth in a classical way.<sup>218</sup> But the *specific* household of the Clergues is discussed *first* as the largest in population, having twenty-two members at the time of the Fournier Inquisition.<sup>219</sup> Perhaps this is a 'trenchant analysis' in Weis' eyes, though it seems to be both important and (for all I can tell) true. Either way, a paragraph later LeRoy Ladurie says he wants to take his reader 'to visit' the Clergues at home 'so as best to understand them'. What follows may not be narrative history, but it does reveal *visible* if (by themselves) minor details about the everyday life of Pierre Clergue and the brother Clergue:

We would like to visit this *domus* to understand it best: while we wait for hypothetical excavations of Montaillou,<sup>220</sup> we will content ourselves with the glance thrown on said house by Fabrisse Rives, taverner in the village. Lacking measures to measure the

---

<sup>218</sup> See Siedentop 2014.

<sup>219</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 89

<sup>220</sup> This refers to the absence of archaeological excavations of Montaillou in 1974. By 1996, a professional dig had been established, partly thanks to the interest LeRoy Ladurie's book garnered. Some of the results were summarized by David Maso and JP Cazes in their contribution to LeRoy Ladurie, Brenon and Dieulafait, et al, 2001. See also the very clear maps at the beginning of Weis 2000: unpaginated.

wine, she decides to borrow one from her neighbours Clergue. Having arrived at the doorway of their *ostal*, she first met, warming themselves in the sun near the door, three old matrons of the area, robust Cathar working-women: it was Mengarde Clergue, the mother of the parish priest, and her friends Guillemette Belot and *Na Roqua*.<sup>221</sup> Fabrisse enters, climbs to the *aula* or antechamber of the *solier* (first floor terrace) itself situated above a small lowered floor, half-underground, called *sotulum* (cellar). The taverner, in the *aula*, came across Pierre Clergue; she saw in his bedroom the famous wine-measure on a table... and also the *perfectus* Guillaume Authié, who hid himself there, – without deceiving much, it is true to say.<sup>222</sup>

This is truly ‘through the keyhole history’, as Ferdinand Mount put it in reviewing the already popular *Montaillou* in 1978, trying to explain its popularity.<sup>223</sup> Perhaps he need not have bothered with the cliché, though, given that LeRoy Ladurie has already explained that he is conducting a kind of historical ethnography. The point is that we follow someone local through the door itself, following their words, as the beginning of our inquiry into montalionalis life. Straightaway we know it has something of the Roman villa about it, with reception rooms opening out into the publicity of the family’s broader connections (later we will see that the montalionalis worship of family was equally strong as the Romans’). The broader functioning of the house is then summarized in relation to other, poorer houses. The variety of rooms testifies to its superior status in the present, the prodigious flow of wine as a semi-currency exchanged for influence (14000 *pots*, perhaps equivalent to 1400 sheep) demonstrate a certain, well, liquidity; and the attached lands, with pigs and cattle, begin to tell of a supremacy established over time.<sup>224</sup> Bernard Clergue, the bailiff, is described as being devoted to

---

<sup>221</sup> The Occitan honorific *Na* was given to matriarchs; it adds a crime-family flavour to the *domus* system.

<sup>222</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 89-90

<sup>223</sup> Mount 1978: 37. Mount reports that in France it had sold 200,000 copies in just four years.

<sup>224</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 90. Unless bought outright, a herd can work roughly like tree rings, given the relatively fixed rate of its reproduction.

both this ground and his brother Pierre,<sup>225</sup> and our understanding of this devotion is heightened by LeRoy Ladurie's account of the *domus/ostal*, which he says form the 'basic cell' out of which Montaillou is built.<sup>226</sup>

This claim pushes other institutions to the 'outside of the village': the nobility, the seigneurie (local power holders), and the church.<sup>227</sup> What could express such a power? The interchangeable terms *domus* (Latin) and *ostal* (Occitan) refer to a combination of family, property, and ancestry, carrying the power of intimate attachments, hierarchy, 'luxury' and its attendant needs (or its relative lack and compromises).<sup>228</sup> It is also through the cell of the family which the Cathar heresy spreads, and this is recognised as much by the Inquisition as by the Cathars themselves.<sup>229</sup> It is likely that the other powers of the *domus* gave it this one. LeRoy Ladurie offers us the montalionsais-dualist testimony of Jacques Authié:

*Satan entered the Kingdom of the Father, and told the Spirits of the kingdom that he, the devil, possessed a paradise even better again... Spirits, I will lead you to my world, added Satan, and I will give you cows to eat and milk, wealth, a wife as a companion, and you will have your own ostals, and you will have children... and you will rejoice more for one child, when you have one, than for all the rest you have here in Paradise.*<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 90

<sup>226</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 51

<sup>227</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 51

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Hegel 1991: 231 (§195) for 'luxury'. Hegel has just been discussing 'the transition from family to civil society', which perhaps we may describe Montaillou as being part-way through. The language of right is there, but the personal-cum-family power of the Clergues dominates: Hegel 1991: 219 (§181); cf. LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 417-18, where Montaillou is said to be slow in reaching 'the stage of *municipalité consulaire* [i.e. a formal local institution administering the community].

<sup>229</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 56-7

<sup>230</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 59



He notes that the *ostal* comes in second, after the women and the cows, but before the children. In fact, this might seem like a rather forced use of this particular evidence, given that LeRoy Ladurie is saying that the *ostal* comes first though it comes third in the temptations offered by Satan. He might instead have suggested that the list of Satan runs all these things together rather than offering them as partible gifts. What is depicted is a whole life in an inverse paradise – the material world – not a series of alienated returns. Also, the connection between Jacques Authié’s story and the real life of the montalionais Cathars is far from clear, given their (ideal) rejection of the Satanic, material world. The *perfecti* were disallowed from sex, remember, and it is this which makes Pierre Clergue a Diogenes, of sorts, but they were not required to disavow property like monks and nuns. The inverse paradise may well reflect unease with the actual world of Montailhou specifically (one tends to reject one’s own world in Christianity, not someone else’s), but this and the intermediate position of the *ostal/domus* in Satan’s list is an obscure mirror. Nonetheless, its central role is assured by other evidence. Apart from the familial, hierarchical, and economic aspects of the *domus*, it is the ancestral element which seems to have carried a strong ideal power, one which is manifested ultimately in attempts to maintain continuity. What Larry Siedentop calls the (pre-classical) ‘ancient family’ traverses history through a metonym, the family hearth; kept alight come what may, the fire represents the life of the family and contains its ashes; later developments adapt to more mobile forms of life and perhaps a less final commitment to territory.<sup>231</sup> In Montailhou, this meant cutting more lasting parts from the dead as relics for their memory:

In Montailhou, the house had one’s *astre*<sup>232</sup>, one’s good fortune, “in which the dead participated once again”. One safeguards that *astre* and this fortune by keeping in the

---

<sup>231</sup> Siedentop 2014: 7-18

<sup>232</sup> French (literal): star – but in a more astrological sense than ‘etoile’.

house some fragments of nail and hair of the perished head of the family: hairs and nails, to the extent to which they continue to grow after death, are carriers of vital energy, especially intense. By using this rite, the house “would be penetrated by certain magic qualities of the person”; it proved capable at the same time of recovering those of the others in the lineage. *When Pons Clergue, the father of the parish priest Pierre Clergue, died recounted Alazäiz Azéma, Mengarde Clergue his wife asked me, and the same to Brune Pourcel, to cut, from the corpse, some locks of hair that he had around the front, as well as some fragments of nail from all his fingers and toes; and they stayed lucky for the house of the dead; we closed the door of the house of Clergue in which was lying the dead body; we cut the hair and the nails from it; and we gave them to Guillemette, the servant of the house, who gave them in her turn to Mengarde Clergue. This “cutting” of hairs and nails was done after we had washed the face of the dead in water (because in Montaillou we do not wash the whole body).*<sup>233</sup>

This is the link between generations. The intimacy, and the simplicity, with which Alazäiz Azéma recounts it detracts from Weis’ claim that the people of *Montaillou* are left submerged. The death of the father makes the devotion of Bernard Clergue to his brother Pierre more understandable, and the emotional power of funeral rites is not diminished by being both generic (as they were performed) and described (by LeRoy Ladurie) in order to exemplify a type. At the heart of the rite is still<sup>234</sup> the hearth, the *foghana* which serves as kitchen, dining room, and reception room, with the body placed there and hair and nails removed to stop it carrying the *astre* of the household away into the next world.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 60-61

<sup>234</sup> See Siedentop 2014: 7-18 and above.

<sup>235</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 61

The *domus*, already described as a ‘crossroads’, was a place of gravity, collecting various activities together as important in one place. LeRoy Ladurie has it as a speaking place, where heresy and gossip spreads, as a line through time, where families continue, and as a ‘cell’ which sucks in wealth (according to the house) and expresses pressures onto the rest of life. Somewhat in opposition to what he saw as this Charybdis of village life, Pierre Maury resisted the call to marry and give himself up to the logic of settling down. We will get to what he chose instead in a moment; but what he avoids is a life of limited options. He is “harangued” by Bernard Bélibaste for his wayward love – from a Cathar point of view – for the non-Cathar<sup>236</sup> Bernadette den Esquinath:

This harangue of Bernard Bélibaste is interesting; it affirms, as it goes, the fundamental values of a certain *occitanism* of the stockmen: straight lines from the *domus* to heresy; the fertility [*prégnance*] of the *domus* itself, with its cortege of possible institutions annexed to it (adoption of a future son-in-law, co-residence with him, dowry); the father of the family, who indicated a son-in-law as an adoptive son for the continuation of his lineage and his *domus*, forecast by an agreement that his daughter, still small, would give her virginity, with her dowry, to the young adult he had named as his successor. The motifs of this diplomacy are simple: Raymond Pierre did not have a son, but only three daughters: Bernadette, Jacotte, and Marquise. He is thus constrained to find a man who wants to come to his home to be a son-in-law.<sup>237</sup>

The *domus* is thus important as a daily setting; but it is also orbited by the rest of life – ‘its cortege of possible institutions’ – which it limits and guides in a way which is hard to specify. LeRoy Ladurie’s adds repeated coats of paint to emphasise its gravity – of

---

<sup>236</sup> In this context, ‘non-Cathar’ is effectively *Catholic*: Catharism required a positive rebellion, so passivity meant being part of the conventional flock, certainly from a Cathar point of view.

<sup>237</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 121; one cannot help but think of *Pride and Prejudice*, but Jane would have run rings around Raymond Pierre; Austen 2015 [1813].

family, wealthy, hierarchy, and ancestry, as we have seen – but there is nothing which in one move provides an exhaustive account of its power. A sense of how its power works is built up as *Montaillou* progresses. Nonetheless, one of the keys to *Montaillou* is the very *emptiness* of Pierre Maury's commitment to shepherding. He is a Romantic figure in LeRoy Ladurie's book, who manages to live in the periphery of the world of the *domus/ostal*

#### 14. Pierre Maury

Maury in some ways mirrors Pierre Clergue, but only, perhaps, as the Kingdom of the Father mirrors the inverse paradise of Satan. His love is ardent but *singular*, and he lives a hard life in the mountains above Montaillou, frugal despite his great wealth of sheep. His main institutional connection is to the *cabanes*, as we have said, the seasonal camps of shepherds established for cooperation (but certainly not collectivization) in tasks such as herding and cheesemaking. His “domestic” world is thus inescapably male, mobile, and somewhat cosmopolitan, with Cathars from the Ariège mixing with Catalans and Berber, with whom he seems to have shared a sense of destiny.<sup>238</sup> That destiny was to keep going around the mountains with the sheep. The Pyrenees are both hot, cold, and steep, and this makes it remarkable that Pierre Maury stuck to this life despite other options gleaned through his social connections and, presumably, enabled by his wealth in walking meat and milk. We will not dwell as much on LeRoy Ladurie's depiction of the *cabanes* as we did the *domus/ostal*; rather it is the ideas and outlook of Pierre Maury which we will add to our *mis-en-scène* for a more analytical discussion later. LeRoy Ladurie wonders whether Pierre Clergue manages to turn his dualism into a Nietzscheism by saying that, since all sex is sinful, there is no sin (were it not for the small matter of five-hundred years, he might have had Dostoyevsky in mind

---

<sup>238</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 191-2

in intoning that ‘all is possible and all is permitted’<sup>239</sup>). As we saw with Hegel, the ‘all’ here is bound by historical, that is to say *social*, conditions. But LeRoy Ladurie also uses Pierre Maury as a representative of a ‘pastoral philosophy, or more simply a philosophy of Montailou’.<sup>240</sup> As one Pierre errs, the other clings to his path, and each sheds a light for us on the same world.

In the first instance, the philosophy of Montailou is the philosophy of destiny which appears to have characterized at least a part of the *mentalité* of the heretic herders whose mode of life LeRoy Ladurie is reflecting on. What we find in the declarations of destiny from Pierre Maury – and Pierre Clergue, a member of Montailou’s preeminent lineage – are, at least superficially, first-person reports on what were considered the *fixed points* which characterized the *montaillonnais* mode of life as a fundamental *mode* enjoying a certain persistence and particularity. In one sense, it is very clear that Pierre Maury could have chosen a less risky way of living (in face of the Inquisition) or a more settled life (which promised greater material wealth and comfort). He was offered these options explicitly by those who felt kindly towards him.<sup>241</sup> In a second sense, however, the tenacity with which Maury resisted these possibilities tells us something about the forces which kept life in Montailou, the Ariège, and the broader Pyrenees in place, and which made certain alternatives, in at least a local way, impossible. At one level, Maury’s philosophy of destiny functions as his explanation to his friends for why he will continue in his mode of life, though it is true that “I must follow my destiny” can be understood as the refusal to explain.

However, considered at the level of LeRoy Ladurie’s own reflection in his composition of *Montailou*, Maury’s “philosophy” has been selected to appear with broader

---

<sup>239</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227

<sup>240</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190

<sup>241</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190-195

explanatory and representational purposes in mind. It does not function merely to explain the particular actions and choices of Pierre Maury, but rather to demonstrate something more generally about the state of the *montalonnais* world. To understand Maury's philosophy of destiny fully – his *mentalité*, though this is a term connoting a more collective sociology of Montaillou<sup>242</sup> – involves appreciating the extent to which, when it appears, it appears without content. His statements of it furnish only gaps where, as we have seen, his avowals of faith in himself are almost refusals to explain.

Here we reach the limits of both a man's comprehension of his own life and the limits of the explicit content of a text. LeRoy Ladurie does not ask whether his interlocutors accept, or even understand, the quasi-explanations Maury offers for rejecting their suggestions, so there is no attempt to generalize with any precision to a *mentalité* which has an autonomous role as an explanans. Our sense of this *mentalité* only emerges as a single, open coordinate, wholly useless and mysterious on its own. The reader of *Montaillou* is thus pushed towards a grander reading of Maury's philosophy in so far as it, and Maury himself, is only a feature in LeRoy Ladurie's cartography. Understanding the man makes us look to his world. As we have begun to see, the cartography of this world comprises descriptions of the *terroir* and the houses, lineages, and routes of transhumance which gave it a broad shape; and then there are the other individuals of *Montaillou*, about whom we learn their sexual preferences (and burdens), the frequency of their bathing, whether they slept clothed or not, how they swore, insulted each other, prayed, or died; and again: their relationships with outsiders, the status of women and children, the power of local elites, and the distribution of wealth.

What is all this getting at? What does it amount to? Somehow, the necessity – the *force* – of Pierre Maury's destiny fits into his world. What we need to keep exploring here is the *modal* dimension (i.e. of possibilities) in LeRoy Ladurie's text: those aspects which

---

<sup>242</sup> See Burgière 2009

reveal the constraints and limits of the *monde montalionais*; the role of possibilities in our understanding of what occurs in that world; and finally the idea that through *Montaillou* we are to understand this world *as* a world of possibilities, and the concomitant idea that this is the primary function of various elements in the text which, ostensibly, convey reality directly. Elucidating this modal dimension is the task of, in a second sense, a philosophy or theory of *Montaillou*. However, making this dimension visible requires considerable theoretical preparation. In order to approach the text from the perspective I want to encourage, we need to test our thinking about possibilities in a laboratory where we can escape, for a while, the complexities of a single text.

## PART THREE: ANALYSIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND HISTORICAL JUDGEMENTS

Possibilities haunt the human sciences.<sup>243</sup>

### 15. Visible and invisible

How do Pierre Clergue's raping Grazide Rives and Pierre Maury's avowing the hard life of the Pyrenean shepherd fit into *Montaillou* – or Montaillou? Both are visible, or at least (if one doubts the *visibility*, quite, of Pierre Maury's speech acts) *manifest*, and each is in its own way significant. Yet, neither is exactly a visible beginning for what Redfield called a 'system' and, although LeRoy Ladurie sometimes takes Redfield as a guide, he is as concerned to let episodes like the rape of Grazide Rives carry their own weight as he is to put them to work in demonstrating the forcefield of the *domus* "system". Redfield's system is for LeRoy Ladurie more a context for events, and addressing it separately does something that is perhaps (one would like to say to Weis) more historiographically subtle than Redfield's 'analysis', turning the *domus* into a *theme* of some more particular descriptions of actions and characters. Pierre Maury and Pierre Clergue, as we have seen, are held up as demonstrative, untypical characters, as Diogenēs. Yet, although these individuals certainly have a gravity about them as people and as points in the text of *Montaillou* neither is an end in himself, for the reader. Through them the reader is placed in their world; one seems almost to look past them, to use them as a vehicle for seeing what they see (such as the physical house of Clergue) in the ethnographical way LeRoy Ladurie aspires to, rather than directly at them. Yet, one grasps them in their specificity, and so necessarily from a combination of proximity and

---

<sup>243</sup> Hawthorn 1991: xi



distance; and although one hopes to have left behind the wide eyes of the new arrival – the jet-lagged ethnographer's, Adso's perhaps, or even Hans Castorp's<sup>244</sup> – one continues to see them as a 'product' (in Hegel's, later Marx's, sense) of their time and place. This is a matter for interpretation, not assimilation – as if the particular personality or action could be *predicted* through its time and place.

Not even Brother William's clever trick with the horse – and the *name* of the horse, Brunellus – was a prediction; he only manages to achieve that impression. What lets him do so, however, is a sensitivity to the significance of *particular* visible clues; he is able to read them as signs of something more general which lets him think about what is plausibly possible – or likely – in the context of which they are parts. It is *as if* he comprehends a system, like Redfield, and this gives him a way of getting at what might come next. Yet, the shape of the relevant context is not as regular as the Chan Kom's annual round of planting, rites, and harvest, of which the sight of a man kneeling in the dust is both part and clue. It is not clear, as William says, whether the fraught events at the Abbey fit into something with sides or which forms a whole – however impressed Adso might be by the geometrical architecture. It is partly William's ability to acknowledge its chaos – its human, worldly elements – which makes him seem so wise. Now, *Montaillou* is never reduced to system; but neither does it terminate in events like the appearance of Brunellus. If anything, it is an attempt to portray Montaillou as an irregular shape (allow the metaphor for now), for which the Pyrenees are probably the best icon<sup>245</sup> and not the geometry of a church: the latter, of course, is what the Cathars

---

<sup>244</sup> See Mann 1999 [1924]

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964: 28 and op. cit. fig. 2 (Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*, c.1900). Part of the reason this study – mine – contains no explicit discussion of the problem of structure (in the Annales tradition or in social theory) is that I take it the problem has been solved. It has been solved partly by Jack Goldstone, who in *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* insists quite rightly that there is no single social level or scale which is to be solely privileged with the term: it is a non-problem; see Goldstone 1991: chp.1. In a similar fashion, Randall Collins says that 'agency/structure

were resistant to. Recall Merleau-Ponty's thought that the visible world is the best diagram of vision itself.<sup>246</sup> Both he and Brother William are sensitive to the fact that visible clues are not put to work by staring at them as closely as possible, trying to read their meaning internally.<sup>247</sup> Rather, one needs 'the proper *distance*':

Only when you are at the proper distance will you see that it is Brunellus (or, rather, that horse and not another, however you decide to call it). So an hour ago I could expect all horses, but not because of the vastness of my intellect, but because of the paucity of my deduction. And my intellect's hunger was sated only when I saw the single horse that the monks were leading by the halter.<sup>248</sup>

He knows what he does not know. Apprehending Brunellus might need the horse itself to be quite close, visible indeed; but the clues which lead up to this meeting also require a proper distance because they signify a range of possibilities in the wider world, a world which needs to be in view. This is what Merleau-Ponty says about vision itself:

After all, the world is around me, not before me. Light is retrieved as action at a distance, and not reduced to an action of contact. Vision returns to its power of showing more than itself. It does not work anymore to speak of space and light, but instead of the space and the light which is *here*.<sup>249</sup>

---

is a conceptual morass' to be avoided as a false dilemma; Collins 2004: 5. However, the problem has also received a more technical solution in evolutionary game theory, where all features of an environment are relevant to the development and interaction of individuals. Boyd and Richerson demonstrate the logic of an environment using the contours of an OS map, but they might just have well picked an IGN of the relevant quadrangle of the Pyrenees; see Boyd and Richerson 2005: 287-309; see also Inkpen and Turner 2012 – discussed in more detail below.

<sup>246</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 28

<sup>247</sup> That is to say, without connection to the rest of the world; compare what Cézanne says about a different sort of internality: Merleau-Ponty 1964: 22.

<sup>248</sup> Eco 1984: 28, direct speech; quotation marks removed.

<sup>249</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 59, some omissions – and I put '*here*' for *là* to capture Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the relationship between the observer and the observed.

Later, Merleau-Ponty illustrates this abstract thought by saying that if we see a tile at the bottom of a swimming pool, through the water, what we *see* is something like that-tile-at-the-bottom-of-that-pool-in-the-water.<sup>250</sup> We have encountered something like this thought before:

True, that kind of print expressed to me, if you like, the idea of ‘horse,’ the verbum mentis, and would have expressed the same to me wherever I might have found it. But the print in that place and at that hour of the day told me that at least one of all possible horses had passed that way.<sup>251</sup>

These are not the same thoughts, Merleau-Ponty’s and William’s. The water is immediately visible, unlike the horse; but it may be that we can insist on a continuity between them, given what Merleau-Ponty says elsewhere:

*Everything* I see is in principle a matter of my inclination [*à ma portée*], at least the inclination of my gaze, marked on the card labelled “I can...”<sup>252</sup>

In so far as one views the tile or the hoofmark itself, one views it as a matter for action. (Merleau-Ponty has just been saying that action and vision are part of the same flow, not least because the eyes themselves have to be directed.<sup>253</sup>) Both the hoofmark and the tile are visible. The water is visible, if translucent. The context of the Abbey is presently invisible, and perhaps it is disparate, chaotic, and lacking sides, at least in a moral sense. Yet, both the water and the Abbey limit the possibilities for action

---

<sup>250</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 70

<sup>251</sup> Eco 1980: 27-8

<sup>252</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964: 17, my emphasis; cf. Shütz 2013 [1936-7]: 226.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964: 16-17

indicated by the tile and the hoofmark. Both, therefore, are grasped through what is invisible and presently unreal in some sense: possibilities. The water is a simple, visible clue about the tile as object of action; painting a water-colour of Mt. Sainte-Victoire on it is ruled-out, for instance. William has a more in-depth, less simple grasp of the context of the Abbey. He also seems to know it better than a Redfieldian anthropologist, or a young monk, who has grasped it as a whole. Its apparently systematic elements are only some elements among others. While there is nothing like William's knowledge of the horse Brunellus in *Montaillou*, the sort of familiarity he has with the *possibilities* of the place might capture what LeRoy Ladurie was able to represent historiographically. It is only one line; but recall LeRoy Ladurie's casual reference to the *domus* 'and its cortege of possible institutions annexed to it'.<sup>254</sup> The *domus* here is not a static type because it is run through with the actions which might, plausibly and characteristically, follow from it. Actions too – rapes, the avowal of destiny, having it off in a church – seem to play a similar role in always pointing on to adjacent things, like the water that surrounds the tile in Merleau-Ponty's swimming pool.

So far, my commentaries have only developed the suspicion that this might be so. The discussions which follow here in parts III and IV address the character of possibilities in social history in more depth. *Montaillou* itself will disappear from view for a while, as if we have retired to a laboratory to test a vaccine to be used on the peasants later. Each phase in what follows will address a different way that possibilities can be uncovered in what appears to be the directly told but varied *reality* of *Montaillou*. We will start by considering Jon Elster's proposal in *Logic and Society* that possibilities can play an independent role in explanations.

---

<sup>254</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 121

## 16. Elster: Possibilities in explanation

### *i. Elster's Possibilism*

Fairly early in *Logic and Society*, before much of what is indicated by the book's subtitle (*Contradictions and Possible Worlds*), Elster uses two chapters to discuss the idea that possibility itself might be of independent theoretical value in explanations in social and political science. Initial responses to the book passed over these ideas in silence, focussing instead on the parts about possible worlds, counterfactuals, and contradictions.<sup>255</sup> Now, it may be that Elster too himself saw his work at least partly in this way. He says that part of his task at its beginning is to show that considerations of possibility are 'already' a part of the social sciences, and this is what justifies his more technical usages of modal logic in later chapters.<sup>256</sup> He says that 'I aim to be useful rather than profound'.<sup>257</sup> What Bernard Williams saw as 'the rattle of machinery' in the book is thus to be understood as its core.<sup>258</sup> What Elster seems to mean by denying profundity is that he is not providing a great insight into the fundamental logic of either social science or political thinking. Rather, he means to identify some jobs that he and his team of concepts from modal logic can get on with. However, our interest in uncovering possibilities in *Montaillou* means paying further attention to what Elster

---

<sup>255</sup> Elster developed this thought on contradictions in *Making Sense of Marx*; Elster 1985. For some initial philosophical responses focussing on modality and contradictions, see Taylor 1980, Lukes 1980, Engerman 1980, Markl 1980, Stinchcombe 1980, Rorty 1980, Elster 1980. Dunn connects Elster's modal analyses to the topic of risk; Dunn 2014. Sociological reviewers of Elster's book generally missed its point: Moore 1980 suggested it is about 'mathematical logic' – which it is not; Brownstein 1979 says that the two chapters I am interested in are 'infected with an ambiguous malaise' but does not explain what he means; Wilson 1982 takes issue with Elster's 'natural science model' – though I think the inclusion of modal logic is designed to show precisely that such a model is not being used because like Hawthorn 1991 it treats agents as making choices based on practical reasoning.

<sup>256</sup> Elster 1978: 28

<sup>257</sup> Elster 1978: 62

<sup>258</sup> Williams 2015: 167

seems to have thought of as a preparatory task. To see that possibility is ‘already’ there in some specific ways in *Montaillou* (in the traditionally historical or social scientific elements in LeRoy Ladurie’s work) is to read it in a new way. Elster discusses some models from social science to demonstrate his “possibilism”, by which he means that possibilities play an *independent* role in some explanations. For our reading of *Montaillou*, these models provide hypotheses of some ways in which possibilities might feature in it. They represent the most elementary ways in which possibilities might feature in a work which draws on sociology and anthropology in history.

## *ii. Social mobility*

Elster’s first example of possibilistic reasoning in social science is the analysis of social mobility. He suggests that the Markov model of social mobility can be translated into possibilistic terms, and that there may be some benefit to doing so. A standard Markov chain approach involves probabilities; the point is to try to assign probabilities of change based only the most recent state of whatever it is we are considering.<sup>259</sup> So, a Markov model of social mobility tries to assign probabilities to individuals’ attainment of different social positions based on their present positions. Elster explains this in terms of class, but his use of the word ‘class’ is rather more formal than sociological. What he means is *social position*:

Assuming that we have  $n$  classes, the approach postulates that for each pair  $i, j$  of classes, there is a number  $p_{ij}$  that uniquely characterizes the probability of an individual in class  $i$  at time  $t$  being in class  $j$  at time  $t + 1$ , this number being independent (i) of the past history of mobility of the individual, (ii) of other present characteristics than class membership, and (iii) of events in calendar

---

<sup>259</sup> See Meyn & Tweedie 1993.

time. In principle the same conceptualization can also be made for the study of mobility between generations.<sup>260</sup>

So, whether we are considering mobility within (or regardless of) a generation or intergenerational social mobility, the thought is that mobility can be analyzed as the probability of an individual's moving between two different positions in society. The important thing about a *Markov* model is that the probabilities of change are generated just by the state at the first time (where the relevant change is to be sought in the same state at the second time). The function ' $p_{ij}$ ' just means 'the probability of  $j$  given  $i$ ', as in 'the probability of Mrs. Bastock being a barrister at  $t^2$  given that she is an insurance secretary at  $t^1$ '. To be more precise, Elster treats this as implying a single step: the probability of Mrs. Bastock being a barrister after having been an insurance secretary *with no intervening occupational bridges (such as becoming a legal secretary)*. The intergenerational version would be 'the probability of Mrs. Bastock being a barrister at  $t^2$  given that her mother is an insurance secretary at  $t^1$ ' – although there are different versions depending which relative or set of relatives in one generation is most relevant to a consideration of the mobility of a representative of the family in the next generation. The *single step* requirement is built into the intergenerational version because intervening steps are ruled out by the mother-daughter relation, or whichever *direct* relation one decides is relevant. (See below for some comments about the "intergenerational social mobility" involved in social positions like *queen*.) To provide a concrete example we have used occupational type as a proxy for social position; this carries some assumptions we need not go into.

So far, then, our Markov model of social mobility is a probabilistic not a possibilistic one. We can already observe something interesting and important, however. The model already seems to take (part of) a web of relationships which the individual may

---

<sup>260</sup> Elster 1978: 28

not in fact engage as its locus of interest. The probability of social mobility *itself* is the interesting thing, and this means treating whether Mrs. Bastock *actually* becomes a barrister as irrelevant. However, there is a debate to be had at this point, because it is not obviously wrong to suggest that *once* we have sorted out the correct conceptualization and, perhaps, quantification of social mobility, the purpose to which this will be put is explaining what actually happens – to Mrs. Bastock, and to any other individuals in the society in question. However, what this does begin to suggest is that some models are implicitly possibilistic without being explicitly possibilistic. As I am about to explain, Elster himself is keen to emphasise the usefulness of explicitly possibilistic models – this is why it is important for him to traduce the probabilistic elements of the Markov model into possibilist ones. This is because of his more general desire to show that modal logic has a job to do in social explanation. For my purposes, however, the important thing is that forms of social explanation can at least be shown to be *implicitly* possibilistic, and it does not matter so much if they are best left this way. For example, perhaps it will be more appropriate to use a probabilistic Markov model than the traduced possibilistic version Elster suggests in situations where equally adjacent possibilities are judged to be unequally likely to a relevant degree; nonetheless, that such a traduction is available is sufficient to confirm the fundamental view I am developing about social explanations. How does it proceed?

Elster makes Markov models of social mobility *possibilistic* by keeping all zero probabilities in a Markov chain as zeros, but turning all non-zero probabilities into ones. The rationale is that if something has a non-zero probability, then it is *possible*, and should be encoded as such, whereas zero probability = impossibility (0). This gives us what Elster calls an ‘adjacency matrix’,  $d_{ij}$ . Given the single step requirement introduced above, *adjacency* implies all the *I*s in the immediate vicinity of the individual involved. Furthermore *reachability* can now be defined as all the *I*s



available directly *and via* all these, with the *and via* iterated indefinitely (depending on our interests and the data we have available). In short: where you can get in a hop, and where you can get if you keep hopping.

About this picture, Elster says the following:

It is quite possible that for some purposes this simplified matrix is more analytically fertile than the full probabilistic structure. It might be the case, for example, that *perceived* possibilities of mobility have this simply Yes-No form rather than the gradual character of the  $p_{ij}$  matrix. The unique Negro [sic] that becomes a high court judge or the woman who becomes the president of a large corporation, may have a qualitative impact that is largely independent of the underlying numerical realities.<sup>261</sup>

Now, this does not seem like a terribly well-thought out argument, but I would like to do a little more than criticize it. Irrespective of any criticism, part of the importance of this statement of Elster's supports my interpretation of his possibilism as instrumentalist: he is interested in the analytical *fertility* of the possibilized Markov model. This is what explains his willingness to discount those rare black people and women who achieve top-level positions (remember this is the 1970s) as exceptions to a more interesting 'underlying' rule. The same thought applies to the single Winchester boy who in the 1960s in England was found working in a manual job.<sup>262</sup>

Now to the criticism. The reverse argument to Elster's is available for the same conclusion: if tiny probabilities tend to get treated as *de facto* impossibilities, the possibilistic model might be a corrective.<sup>263</sup> From an analytical point of view, there is

---

<sup>261</sup> Elster 1978: 29

<sup>262</sup> Runciman 2015: 150

<sup>263</sup> *Perceived* inequalities may constitute situations of relative social deprivation; see Runciman 1966. For deprived groups, there may be an enormous (and self-reinforcing) difference between impossibility and improbability. Impossibility means giving up straightaway; but, in desperation, realizing that improbability is not quite the same thing might at least keep one in the game. In a later work, Runciman pointed-out a related form of sociological barrel distortion: imagine a social hierarchy as a triangle; if a

an enormous difference between a society in which ‘unique’ members of disfavoured minorities can rise to the top and societies in which this is ruled-out. Consider, for instance, the difference between the Italian fascist and German Nazi societies: the first might (just, conceivably) have accepted a high-ranking Jew if they were to accept the manly code of behaviour and belief expected of a good Italian in fascist circumstances.<sup>264</sup> On the contrary, the greatest Jew for Hitler was Otto Weininger, his suicide the sole symptom of his greatness: ‘Dietrich Eckhart told me that in all his life he had known just one good Jew: Otto Weininger who killed himself on the day when he realised that the Jew lives upon the decay of peoples’.<sup>265</sup> This might have enormous implications once the analysis of social mobility is linked to a fuller analysis of the society in question: the apparently small probabilistic difference between Nazi and Fascist societies in certain respects might express as institutionally and morally enormous differences in their management of minority populations. Nothing like the Nazi concentration- and death-camp system was to be found in Italy in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>266</sup> Equally, a different sort of “elitist” society than England in the 1960s might be so protective of its elite as to *ban* its members from engaging in manual labour. Something closer to this may have existed in ancient Rome, where the *servi* were disallowed the hot and uncomfortable *toga*. The statistics would not be much different, but the society would be a whole grade different. Perhaps Elster would reply that such

---

tiny proportion of the lowest and most numerous class make it to the top or towards the top, then they will constitute quite a large proportion of the elite (*proportion = total elite / parvenus*), despite the tiny proportion of the bottom class they constitute (*proportion = total bottom-class / social risers*); see Runciman 2015: 146f.

<sup>264</sup> This example is complicated, of course, because the two societies maintained international relations: for more realism, we need to add the constraint that the Italians might have accepted a high ranking Jew *were it not* for their dependence on Nazi Germany.

<sup>265</sup> Monk 1990: 23

<sup>266</sup> For the German camp system, see Wachsmann 2015.

cases are *exceptional exceptions* – this would partly explain their moral importance – and that nevertheless sometimes unique cases can be discounted with discretion.

Yet there is another potential problem with Elster’s argument because he is working under the constraining assumptions of Markovian theory. As he says in the statement quoted above, the mobility deduced in Markov fashion must derive *independently* of (i) the individual’s history (apart from the bits that survived to the present), (ii) anything which can be predicated of this individual other than *class membership* (to which we will now add: *however class is defined*), and (iii) of ‘events in calendar time’. Put aside the vagueness of requirement (iii). Under these restrictions, it is – I suggest – too implausible to imagine societies where only *class membership* is considered, regardless of the extra consideration of *class membership duration* added later by Elster, and which includes an individual exception (or multiple unsystematic exceptions) to the general run of social mobility which *unequivocally* involves membership of the relevant class. To put it another way, membership of class *i*, while it may in some sense describe the individual’s daily condition and position, may not be the factor explaining their mobility. Even if they unequivocally move to class *j*, therefore, the analysis of social mobility as a function of *j* given *i* is upset.

The current slogan-term for this is “intersectionality” and it has been formalized in ‘cluster analyses’, but this does not capture the full problem here<sup>267</sup>: The point is that members of the same ‘class’ in Elster’s terms might have different individual relations or different semi-memberships of other classes, in which case doubt is cast both on the probabilizing or possibilizing *power* of the specific class membership as a theoretical term and the *reality* of classes as (logical, metaphysical) individuals rather than heuristic principles. Perhaps Mrs. Bastock is an insurance secretary, but she becomes a barrister (*in one step*) because she befriends a barrister on the train. Either the system of class

---

<sup>267</sup> For a humane treatment of “intersectionality”, with little jargon, see Sen 2007.

coordinates is unreal, or the system is incomplete – and the exceptions depend on aspects of its unreality or incompleteness, not (as the Markov requirements have it) just on class membership. If the relevant sort of categories are not *real* in the relevant way, neither is intersectionality. If the relevant system of categories (‘classes’) is not complete, then intersectionality is not the only cause of exceptions, so the Markov model fails to capture important factors.

Elster’s reply to this might turn my earlier sort of argument against me in one of two ways. He might say that a society in which an insurance secretary *can* befriend a barrister involves an important and distinguishing quality. Just as the difference between Fascist and Nazi societies, or 1960s and England and ancient Rome, may have been expressed in different institutions for dealing with minorities and inferior groups, so a society where the befriending of an insurance secretary by a barrister on a train is possible is different to one where it is not: *friendship* as an institution may be fundamentally different in such a society. It is not too difficult for us to imagine a society in which being allowed to use the same set of stairs in a building is a necessary condition of friendship. At Winchester in the 1960s, for example. Or Elster might say that a society in which friendship can result in this sort of social mobility is a notably different sort of society to one in which friendships between insurance secretaries and barristers are possible but null, from a social mobility point of view. Imagine, for instance, an idealized “One Nation Conservatism” (perpetuated by elements of the British Conservative Party – and ITV), where hierarchy is maintained in all friendliness. One could chat without loss or gain. This reply makes the issue an empirical one: firstly because (obviously) it depends on the features we find that correlate with social mobility, but also, secondly, because it relies on being able to analyse these features into sufficiently coherent complexes of subordinate social features (like occupation group) to be identifiable as “classes”. This latter problem is what has made class analysis move

away from the folk sociology of “working”, “middle” and “upper” in a twenty-first century British context.<sup>268</sup>

Logically speaking, the societal differences at stake in the examples I have offered here are two-fold: the difference between a society of exceptions versus an absolute society *is different to* the difference between a society where an exception is required for social mobility versus a more characteristically open society (not necessarily in Popper’s sense). Elster in fact considers that the Markov chain approach is invalidated by the empirical finding that the *duration* of an individual’s class membership correlates negatively with their chances of (positive) social mobility. He does not add the ‘positive’ qualifier, and this raises a question about upper and lower limits (is it that duration correlates with *maximum* upwards social mobility but not the extent to which an individual may fall to penury?). However, on the basis of this problem with the Markovian approach, Elster suggests that there might be a ‘trade-off’ – which I take it he thinks is *pragmatic* – between ‘explanatory elegance and metaphysical realism’.<sup>269</sup> What he means is that explaining social mobility might mean referring to the past, even though (metaphysically, realistically) only what has survived to the present can affect the mobility an individual achieves in their next steps.<sup>270</sup>

My proximate aim, of course, is not to provide a good model of social mobility. Let us take the example back to our central concern with possibilities. For Elster, its pertinence is that it shows that social mobility has *particular* features which leave it open to possibilistic analysis, and this means that the involvement of possibilities here is *instrumental* in relation to a pre-existing sociological task – finding a model of social mobility. Within this model, claims about possibility are given an explicit role, at least

---

<sup>268</sup> See Savage 2015; see also Abbot 2001 and Garip 2017.

<sup>269</sup> Elster 1978: 30

<sup>270</sup> See Gellner 1973: 89-108.

according to Elster's analysis. He says that we can speak about *necessary features* of individuals, given their social positioning.

Consider, for instance, the starting-position of *being F*, such as *being (now) an insurance secretary*. As we have seen in terms of *adjacency* and *reachability*, an individual who is F might only be F contingently, if their  $d_{ij}$  matrix includes non-F positions as possibilities – either in one step (adjacency) or more (reachability). If it does not include such possibilities, then the individual is necessarily F. If we can say that the individual is *adjacent* to non-F classes then surely this suffices to make their becoming non-F plausible. If non-F classes are merely *reachable*, then by definition we are talking about possibilities at a remove, and the particular path from the individual's current position to check-mate will have to be examined in detail. This will be especially important if we want to discuss the plausibility of a larger-scale historical change involving not only a merely reachable position for this individual, but when this reachability depends on the actualization of other merely reachable states, perhaps via the actions of other individuals. For an example – which departs a little from our local topic of social mobility – consider the plausibility of peace in a civil war at a particular time: leaders of *both* sides need to be able to reach the new role of peacemaker simultaneously. (Think of their relations with the people they lead, to whom previously they have been mainly war-leaders; a famous example is Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.<sup>271</sup>) So, although *adjacency* gives us a precise sufficient condition for plausibility, the rest of Elster's theory does nothing to give us a full definition. Part of Hawthorn's point, of course, is that such a technical definition is unavailable.

---

<sup>271</sup> Later we will see that Elster makes some claims about political possibility subject to the qualifier that they only hold in run-of-the-mill circumstances – and not, for example, in civil wars. The suggestion is that it is possible to speak of roles in a stable situation, but not in a fluid one: this is patently untrue given that civil wars have structures and hierarchies, even if these are sometimes not *admitted* to be institutions; see Kalyvas 2006.

Judgements of plausibility are increasingly intuitive, underived, and uncertain as they become more interesting.

It is important to notice that the idea of a necessary feature of an individual in an adjusted Markovian model of social mobility is distinctly historical. (We also need to note that because ‘class’ has a technical meaning for Elster, it is at this point that the example of occupational group *alone* fades into irrelevance.) Following Rescher, I have referred to this as “conditional possibility”.<sup>272</sup> What changes primarily are the conditions: when the conditions change, the possibilities change. Elster is *instrumentalist* about this in so far as he is keen to press that such conditional possibilities (e.g. of an insurance secretary becoming a barrister) can be useful in finding out about what actually happens. If duration is added to the Markov model, we do not imagine that time’s passing alone changes the relevant set of possibilities.<sup>273</sup> Rather, *in the meantime*, various things that positively affect social mobility for the individual in question come into play: Elster gives the examples of aspiration and income levels.

As such, for Elster, possibilities in this particular example work like useful proxies for actual factors which have not yet been analyzed as such. So, Elster’s claim that possibilities in this example have ‘an *independent* theoretical function’ is highly qualified. If possibilities here are merely useful for explaining actual social mobility, then our references to them must introduce proxies for *actual* factors. So the truly independent role of possibilities – the very essence of ‘possibilism’ – in Elster’s adjusted Markovian model of social mobility is somewhat shaky. Nevertheless, it does show that *references* to possibility can feature in sociological investigations, but they will be features of the sociologist’s intermediate state of knowledge, as we described it

---

<sup>272</sup> Rescher 2003

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Elster 1978: 30

in relation to Brother William above. The greater details which later will remove the need for such proxies – the appearance of the horse itself – might be approached best through a model where the possibilities are contextualised by a limited model of reality. The possibilistic parts of the model are ‘the idea of ‘horse’’, but to find the actual horse means tracing actual hoofmarks indicating movements through it. A more robust demonstration of Elster’s possibilism might be available in his analysis of kinship systems – such central elements of *Montaillou*.

### *iii. Kinship Systems*

Whereas the example of social mobility served mainly to show that ideas about possibilities themselves may already have a place in social science,<sup>274</sup> Elster uses the examples of kinship, income, and taste to develop this with some ideas about good and bad possibilistic reasoning. The purpose of this is not so much formal as rhetorical: “if we can distinguish between good and bad possibilistic reasoning, then possibilistic reasoning at least has a role to play”. This is the rhetoric of the confession or auto-critique. As we will see, in each case Elster rejects certain aspects of what he takes to be existing possibilistic reasoning in order to make sure that what remains constitute solid pillars for his interest in possibility in the rest of his book. Levi-Strauss is said to have a pseudo-logical approach to social structures in general, but quite a useful logic of kinship structures in particular;<sup>275</sup> proposals about the counterfactuals involved in evaluating national income are shown to be only variably sober;<sup>276</sup> the idea of analyzing consumers or moral actors as actual, that is to say *fixed* preference sets is shown to be inadequate in view of their possibilities for change – and yet Elster finds ethical

---

<sup>274</sup> Elster 1978: 28

<sup>275</sup> Elster 1978: 33-5

<sup>276</sup> Elster 1978: 35-38



problems with the idea that this licenses a manipulation of individuals via their possibilities.<sup>277</sup> Once again, Elster's emphasis is on the *usefulness* of possibilities as such in these models, but some of what he says indicates a more fundamental role for possibilities in social science. Let us focus on kinship systems.

Elster's discussion is focussed on the structuralism of Levi-Strauss. In particular, he is interested in Levi-Strauss' idea of a 'mechanical' as opposed to statistical model of kinship. A mechanical model, like a machine, contains a finite set of elements linked in restricted ways, and thus contains a finite set of possible positions. Elster goes on to say:

In my opinion his later work on classification schemes and mythology has degenerated into an arbitrary and gratuitous exercise of misplaced ingenuity, totally lacking in intersubjective validity.<sup>278</sup>

In short, he thinks structuralist analyses have been fabricated. His reason concerns the logical posits required to turn cultural material – like cooking practices – into the right sort of parts such that they can fit into the right sort of combinatorial machine. In order to function in this way, the parts need to work in *opposition*, so when they are translated into a logical – *sociological* – model, with them is imported the logically fundamental and ostensibly very useful idea of a contradiction. The purpose of this is to create conditional possibilities: if A and B are incompatible (or 'not compossible' – *co-possible* – in the language of modal logic), then given that A and B are part of the same set of elements, this lets us reduce and therefore define the set of possibilities the set of elements makes possible. Strictly we are talking about a function: the set of "elements" is the domain – "the parts of the machine" – the set of enabled possibilities is the range. The range is thus the system's range of possible positions. The modal logic involved in

---

<sup>277</sup> Elster 1978: 39-42

<sup>278</sup> Elster 1978: 34

this is extremely simple and quite flawless: some parts fit together in limited ways, so their results are limited too. But it all depends on the idea of *opposition* we started with.

It is certainly amusing to read a description of the differences between French and English cooking in terms of three binary oppositions, but no evidence at all is given that these oppositions have any existence at all outside the mind of Levi-Strauss.<sup>279</sup>

Elster's repetition of 'at all' in such close order reveals that his amusement carries with it a certain exasperation. He continues: if 'any *difference* can serve as an *opposition*' this makes 'the theory so flexible as to be impossible to falsify'. Notice that the point is *not* that differences, even apparently fundamental ones, cannot be found between French and English cooking, but that treating such differences as generating completely different machine-like systems of possibilities seems to be rather made-up. This is very different, for instance, to claiming that within French cooking *given* the practice of beginning with a *sauce mère*, there is a restricted vector of possible sauces which can be put together on its basis. It is also different to pointing out the contrast between French and English cooking in terms of the presence and absence of such a practice (if the two traditions were not in fact so intertwined!). The difficulty is with claiming that this can be further explicated with reference to an absolute difference of logic established by binary oppositions.

Yet neither can mere logic *rule out* that we will find binary oppositions in real social life. Elster thinks that just such an example is kinship. He argues that because the following set of rules involving *oppositions* can be matched to the real world, a structuralist theory of kinship is available. As with 'class' in social mobility, 'type' here has a technical meaning:

- (i) Only individuals of the same type can marry each other;

---

<sup>279</sup> Elster 1978: 34

- (ii) The type of an individual depends only upon the individual's sex and the type of his [sic] parents.
- (iii) Two boys (or two girls) having parents of different types will themselves be of different types.<sup>280</sup>

By plugging in a quantity of types, these rules generate a matrix of possible *systems* which can be used to deal with relations between the types. Elster says that 4 types leads to 576 systems. This might not seem very relevant to understanding real societies, but further rules can be used to restrict the number of 'permissible' types – by which I understand Elster to mean the types that it is anthropologically *plausible* to imagine a society adopting. These further rules state that permissible pairings (quaintly, Elster has 'marriages') depend on the kind of relationship (e.g. no first cousins), that no man can pair with his sister, and that for any pair at least some of their offspring must be permitted to pair. The point is essentially that no society known to social science has been *based* on incest, but equally none is known to have been *completely* fastidious in this regard – given the practicalities of a limited gene-pool. It is common, for instance, to make something of the probability that every European is related to Charlemagne, but we keep going.

With respect to the absence of incest-based societies, Scheidel has argued that the exceptions prove the rule.<sup>281</sup> He proposes that while incest has sometimes been highly valued, its value can be linked to how *difficult* it is to overcome the hard-wired incest taboo. In one example, an aristocrat is lauded for having had incestuous sex three times. The point may be that this reinforces the impermissibility of incest by showing that it is an inaccessible and elite pursuit. (Why some societies have not needed to

---

<sup>280</sup> Elster 1978: 34

<sup>281</sup> See Scheidel 2013; see also Scheidel 2009, where the idea that incest *might* be the basis for a society is given sense: mechanism of sexual patterns are used to explain social patterns in political authority in ancient empires.

demonstrate the limits in this ostentatious way is a separate question.) This means that incest has never formed the basis for a functional kinship system – although presumably we ought to allow that sustained incest within a single family constitutes at least a protean version of such a system. Yet, the rules above allow for some variation in what is considered incest, so we might find borderline cases in, for instances, the English and Habsburg aristocracies considered as relatively closed kinship systems.<sup>282</sup>

Elster's point, though, is that kinship is an empirical exception, so opposition-based structural analysis of this sort cannot be employed as a general sociological method. We have seen him criticize Levi-Strauss' culinary analyses, and he also suggests that a similar mistake is to be found in Marxist theories analysing the relations of production in terms of binary oppositions in an attempt to clarify the full set of possible modes of production. He calls this 'pseudo-science', akin to 'the biologically inspired sociology of the 1890s'. However: Scheidel argues that the odd elite Zoroastrian having it away with his sister (presumably to the sound of clapping by their priest) demonstrates the rule that *incest-based systems* have never prevailed; conversely, Elster argues that despite the 'amusing' *a priori* excesses of Levi-Strauss, the *a posteriori* application of structuralism to kinship demonstrates that at least *sometimes* possibilistic reasoning is truly valuable in the social sciences:

Here, then, we have another (metaphorical) sense in which the halo of possibilities that surround the actual should be explored for a full understanding of the actual itself.<sup>283</sup>

The function of thinking about the halo of possibilities, then, is to achieve a better understanding of 'the actual' – by which Elster means the actual kinship *system* is to be understood in the context of the set of possible systems. So, as with social mobility, Elster's possibilism is *particularistic* in so far as the example depends on the

---

<sup>282</sup> For the opposite analysis of the English aristocracy, see Stone & Stone 1986.

<sup>283</sup> Elster 1978: 35

peculiarities of kinship analysis, and *instrumentalist* in so far as possibilities are used as the mere means of understanding.

In discussing social mobility, it seemed fairly natural to treat possibilities as means within a Markovian or quasi-Markovian analysis: there is a predefined sociological goal, and possibilities – it would seem – can help us achieve it. I suggested that we might consider the general state of social mobility possibilities itself as a *locus of interest*, but it was difficult to add this as anything much more than an afterthought. With kinship, however, the same point might be seen to emerge more organically. Indeed, Elster as it were explicitly passes over the thought that for Levi-Strauss:

The object of the human sciences is society as such or man as such; the range of variation of all possible objects of a given kind; the common features of all possible objects of a given kind; the possible and the necessary, never just the actual.<sup>284</sup>

This is precisely the sort of possibilistic dimension we might hope to reveal in *Montaillou* – though as a particular society, not *sub specie* ‘society as such’.<sup>285</sup> Yet: notwithstanding his grand vision of the human sciences, Levi-Strauss seems like something of a dead-end for our particular inquiry. As Elster shows, his grasp of the possible relies on a superficially mechanistic sort of general model, more ‘trenchant’ (recall Weis’ caution) than Adso’s fervour for geometry or Redfield’s hints about system. Kinship systems might, perhaps, be open to mechanistic analyses, demonstrating that sometimes we might take an interest in the merely possible if it is bound by a specific reality. We need to keep going, though, to get a deeper grasp of the

---

<sup>284</sup> Elster 1978: 33

<sup>285</sup> See I.3 above.

dimension of possibility to be found in *Montaillou*. Elster's modal analyses of politics can take us a little further.

#### *iv. Kingdoms*

What Elster means by politics is simply power situations.<sup>286</sup> In such a situation, some achievements are possible, others impossible – relative, that is, to the *routine*. One's accessible means of power can change if other people act differently or enjoy certain achievements. Elster says that the analysis of political possibility he offers (of which we will consider just a part) is only supposed to apply to routine politics:

Let us first observe that there is indeed within political life an aspect of routine struggles for power within limits accepted and understood by all. Inside the limits are the possible outcomes for which it is worth while [sic] engaging in a fight; outside are the political impossibilities that no one in his senses could want to turn into an issue. In Spinozistic terms this routine behaviour is *politicized politics*, as opposed to the *politicizing politics* where the routines are created. In the former the fight, by common agreement, takes place within the borders of the possible.<sup>287</sup>

There is an important thought here, but there are also various problems with Elster's way of expressing it. Firstly, he seems to be committed to saying that sometimes people do the impossible. This might be good enough for certain sorts of revolutionary rhetoric (I have in mind the many uses of 'Be realistic – demand the impossible!', first in Paris in '68), but it is not good enough given Elster's desire for precision. We could try adjusting everything he says in terms of 'possible' and 'impossible' here to 'routine' and 'not-routine', or even 'normal' or 'not-normal'. However, this detaches the

---

<sup>286</sup> We will not get into the discussion about how to define power.

<sup>287</sup> Elster 1978: 50

vocabulary from possibilism and probably achieves little more than those who insist on calling patterns in political power “structures” in a way that suggests a single sort of entity, rather like a building, in which societies are housed.<sup>288</sup> There is also a problem of vagueness with Elster’s defining this sort of possibility with reference to what is ‘accepted and understood by all’ and what is subject to ‘common agreement’. He seems to have something in mind akin to Weber’s notion of legitimacy, where a particular regime can be shown empirically to enjoy a lack of outright dissent and resistance.<sup>289</sup> *Illegitimate* regimes may well correspond, therefore, to Spinoza’s ‘politicizing politics’, where the state must constantly invent its power – such as in states of ‘permanent revolution’ (for some socialists) or ‘states of exception (for at least one famous Nazi).<sup>290</sup>

Whereas in his possibilistic analysis of social mobility Elster was able to draw fine distinctions between what is available immediately and what is available give certain steps, here the notion of political possibility seems to have been restricted in an unnecessarily binary fashion. Under such a restriction, it is unlikely that Elster will shed much light on the political concepts he wishes to analyse, but the nature of this arbitrary restriction offers us some clues about how better to grasp the involvement of possibilities in *Montaillou*. Elster offers a dual analysis of political systems and the particular political roles which characterize them: kingdoms (with kings) and republics (with presidents).

Elster begins by considering different ways of considering the relationship between a system (*monarchy/republic*) and the roles (*king-queen/president*) it is defined by. In what follows, he uses the symbol for existential quantification (‘ $\exists$ ’), which in plain English can just be read as ‘there is at least one ...’ or ‘there is a/n ...’:

---

<sup>288</sup> See my comments on Goldman 1991 and Boyd & Richerson 2005 above.

<sup>289</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 212-216

<sup>290</sup> See Schmitt 2007.

- (1) In a monarchy it is necessary that  $(\exists x)$  (x is a monarch).
- (2) In a monarchy  $(\exists x)$  (x is necessarily a monarch).
- (3) In a republic it is necessary that  $(\exists x)$  (x is a president).
- (4) In a republic  $(\exists x)$  (x is necessarily president).
- (5) It is politically necessary that  $(\exists x)$  (x is a monarch).
- (6)  $(\exists x)$  (it is politically necessary that x is a monarch).
- (7) It is politically necessary that  $(\exists x)$  (x is president).
- (8)  $(\exists x)$  (it is politically necessary that x is president).<sup>291</sup>

Elster argues that true modal claims<sup>292</sup> – which he takes at least some of (1-8) to be – can be used to characterize particular political systems in terms of possibilities involving social roles. (We are of course dealing here with political roles in particular.) While Elster has various things to say about (1-8), one function of his discussion is to show that some of these claims are not only true in virtue of their meaning – ‘logically true’ – but also *informative* for an analysis of societies. What we are to be informed about are their possibilities. As with Levi-Strauss’ grand vision, information about possibilities is supposed to be substantive. One way an analysis of these claims could be informative is if they can help us bring out the differences between a monarchy and a republic, and thereby the difference between a monarch and a president. If this can be done in terms of claims about possibility, then we will have some support for saying that role-concepts like *king* and system-concepts like *kingdom* are to be understood in terms of a possibilist semantics; but we will need to ask whether Elster construes this semantics in a satisfactory way.

Elster says that (5-8) are essentially contingent matters, and might therefore be true or false depending on the circumstances. Statements (1-4), seem to tell us something

---

<sup>291</sup> Elster 1978: 54

<sup>292</sup> I.e. any claims attributing a state of contingency (possibility, necessity, impossibility) to something.



about what the role-concepts and system-concepts *mean*: (1) and (3) are tautologies. We need to unpack them to see why. Elster was somewhat remiss in failing to analyze all of these statements as involving conditional claims. Given that the claims about possibility they contain are bound by conditionals, it is worth noting that yet again we are dealing with what Rescher calls ‘reality-linked possibilities’ (the sorts of possibilities that depend on particular, actual facts).<sup>293</sup> There is a danger that this makes Elster’s talk of *necessity* superfluous. Why are (1) and (3) tautologies?

Making the conditionals explicit – and putting S for ‘system’ – (1) and (3) mean the following:

(1\*) If S is a monarchy, then there is a monarch in S.

(3\*) If S is a republic, then there is a president in S.

The explicit claims about necessity drop-out because now we are just talking about valid connections between antecedents and consequences in a material conditional. The only sense of ‘necessary’ we are dealing with is a local, conditional one. So, (1) and (3), and (1\*) and (3\*), are tautologies because monarchy *means* something like ‘political system with a monarch’. It is not so clear that Elster is right to think that a republic necessarily has a president, but the logical thought stands.

But this does not get us to the core of Elster’s point: rather, he wants to contrast (1) and (3) with (2) and (4). Note that (1) and (3) suggest that in a monarchy/republic a monarch/president is required, somewhat regardless of who this turns out to be (and by what procedure) – which so far does not seem very informative or very interestingly modal in character. On the contrary, (2) and (4) suggest that it is a fact about someone in the monarchy/republic that *they* are necessarily the monarch/president. This

---

<sup>293</sup> Rescher 2003: 45f

difference stops us deducing (2) or (4) from (1) or (3), even if initially the instinct that ‘well, someone has got to do it’ draws us into thinking we can. Putting aside the truth of (2) and (4), dropping the explicit claim about necessity seems to make more difference because the necessity (or not) of particular individuals holding particular roles seems to be central to the difference between a republic and monarchy. We cannot *deduce* (4) from (3), because (4) is false while (3) is logically true. Neither can we deduce (3) from (1), because all (1) requires is that someone, *anyone*, be monarch. Nonetheless, it may be another, independent feature of monarchy that the selection procedure involves a necessarily unique candidate. As Elster puts it:

Kings are kings by some kind of necessity, and not everyone can become a king; presidents are presidents more or less by accident, and almost everyone can become one.<sup>294</sup>

This certainly captures something about what some people *in monarchies* have tried to say about how monarchies work. One of the most famous statements of this sort is *Patriarcha* (1648) by Sir Robert Filmer – an intellectual contemporary of Hobbes and Locke. A king is to be treated as being *essentially* a king, and this necessity is partly what defines the role *king*. Elster discusses this in terms of a genetic criterion of necessity. Thus, the relevant question here is: could this person have been this person in ways which would not have made them king? This makes an individual who *is* king look like they are necessarily king because monarchical societies define kings in terms of their genetic link to their parents, and arguably a given person has the parents they have of necessity. Elster points out, however, that this is misleading because despite ‘the essential property of having one’s [actual, specific] parents for one’s parents [...] it is not essential for the parents to have their [actual, specific] children as children’.<sup>295</sup>

---

<sup>294</sup> Elster 1978: 54. Americans seems to have gone to unspeakable lengths to prove this to themselves recently.

<sup>295</sup> Elster 1978: 55

The idea that having my parents as my parents is an ‘essential property’ is just the result of some philosophical wangling. As in Elster’s analysis of social mobility, these are cases where something about an individual depends essentially on their relations to others, and these relations can change. As the first thousand years of English Royal history shows, kingship can be viciously contingent. In this case, a person’s parents (and their actions) function as *conditions* for the specific status of their child, and this contributes to a context where that child has a specific set of socially sanctioned, and therefore practicable, possible courses of action. What happens before, however – the *genesis* – is only a contribution to the circumstances they face. There will be other contributions, as when John Lackland (“Prince John” of Robin Hood notoriety) was trying to maintain the throne in face of demands for Magna Carta by his nobles in the wake of defeat at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214. Yet, quite as Elster indicates is possible, the nobles then were contesting the throne, not trying to destroy it, though elements of Magna Carta were to be incorporated into America’s republican constitution in 1787. England itself had to wait until the 1640s for the routine to be broken – the schism that made Filmer’s *Patriarcha* so urgent. Quite how one decides whether or not to upgrade the English Civil War to a ‘revolution’, as Eric Hobsbawm suggested one ought, depends on one’s judgement of the extent of the potential for constructive reversal it held.<sup>296</sup>

Now, elements in Elster analysis of kingdoms suffer from the same problem as I mentioned above: it is not entirely clear that he means *possibility* when he says ‘possibility’. Otherwise, it is questionable whether Elster’s assertions are true. Is it really true that in America – the contrast class for his analysis of kingdoms – anyone can become President? This might be as self-serving a national myth as the thought that an English king has a unique claim to the throne and, perhaps, divine support. Under a

---

<sup>296</sup> Hobsbawm 1977 [1962]: 36

Marxist analysis in the style of Gramsci, for instance, we ought to look to see the extent to which the set of individuals who actually become president can be understood as a function of particular portions of civil society.<sup>297</sup> If factors like this are hidden, then we face a similar problem using concepts like *president* as with the selective descriptions of ‘classes’ or ‘states’ in a Markov model. ‘Anyone can become president’ is, plausibly, just a feature of a particular analysis, perhaps one affected by the story some Americans tell themselves and others. Conversely, it may be correct to claim that in a monarchy anyone can become king – they just need to get rich enough and good enough at violence. So are the English perfect egalitarians too, but with a sense of irony? Elster might reply that he has already accounted for contingencies involving pretenders to the throne by saying that his theory only works for ‘routine politics’: a pretender is likely to have to start a civil war. Another way of putting this is that they would have to suspend the monarchy, as if a play were to pause in front of the audience while all the actors swapped clothes.<sup>298</sup> The difficulty in believing the new cast afterwards may be similar in both sorts of case, and this is why so much ceremonial effort is put into preserving a sense of the routine.

There are two things to note about this reply, however. Firstly, it only works for the problem I have raised with the *king* case, not the parallel problem with *president*: analyzing the functional relationship between certain elements of civil society and the presidency is an analysis of routine politics. Second, and more seriously, there seems to be something circular here about how Elster employs the idea of routine. If we assume we are dealing with a monarchy, then monarchy seems to be part of the local definition

---

<sup>297</sup> Gramsci 1971 [1930-2]: 235 on the deeper entrenchment of the middle classes in civil society; cf. Marx 1994 [1848]: 161 on how ‘[t]he executive of the modern State is but a committee for organizing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Mantel 2009: 650. Struck in execution, St. Thomas More’s Catholic corpse – a symbol of England’s new Anglicanism – is described as leaping ‘back from the stroke and’ folding ‘itself like a stack of old clothes’.

of what counts as routine. *Ex hypothesi* all of the non-monarchical possibilities will be ruled out of the *routine* category, becoming necessarily *non-routine*. Whatever the truth involved in saying that monarchy was routine in 1936, then, the specific claims Elster makes about monarchy on this basis seem somewhat vacuous. For instance, Elster says that (5) ‘It is politically necessary that there is a monarch’ is true of England in 1936. It is hard to see what saying this achieves beyond saying that monarchy was routine. Certainly, there was an English monarch, and monarchy, in 1936. However, in light of the point Elster himself makes about Markov (and similar) models, we seem to stand in need of a more detailed picture of what ‘monarchy’ means in 1936, and it probably is not what it meant in 1534. Arguably, the English crown was shakier in 1534 (when, if you recall, Thomas Cromwell had to work so hard under the weight of Henry VIII to keep the Tudor royal line afloat) than in 1936; but both situations involved a degree of danger and resistance to the system. Catholics like Thomas More in 1534 were more of a threat than British Communists in 1936, but nonetheless there were existential risks for both the monarchies of Henry VIII and Edward VIII, independently of the latter’s personal disinclination to rule.

## **17. Stinchcombe: Possibilities in sociological concepts**

The basic thought that concepts indicating elements in a social system like *king*, or a particular type of social system like kingdom, may include an independent role for possibilities can be found in another book from 1978. While Elster made possibilism his central concern in *Logic and Society*, Stinchcombe included it almost as an afterthought, expressed for the first time in the conclusion of *Theoretical Methods in Social History*. It is as if it were obvious. Perhaps it is. But only a limited number of people have noticed it.

To say that an army is men obeying does not make it (ordinarily – outside times of revolution) a random concatenation of whims. For the whole point is that people's definition of the situation they are in is powerfully determined by what situation they are in, and that is an institutional product. It was not the whim of the eighteenth-century French nobility that they should defend their privileges through *parlements* and turn over their public functions to an (noble) *Intendant*. Likewise, it was not a whim but a mode of production combined with technical changes that led hundreds of textile capitalists to make up their minds to decrease the ratio of spinners to helps on the machines.<sup>299</sup>

'Thus the question,' Stinchcombe goes on to say, 'is not whether we need structural concepts, but what we should build them out of'.<sup>300</sup> So, for Stinchcombe it is a question of semantics. The picture I have been building in relation to Elster is one where we try to see the constituent parts of our 'structural concepts' for what they are – possibilities. Stinchcombe glosses his previous examples to show us what he takes to be the significance of the question of semantics:

What an army consists of is a system for maintaining the definition of the system, in each soldier's mind, that says he had better obey – the way armies break down in revolutions cannot be understood otherwise. What a mode of production consists of is what capitalists cannot help doing if they are to stay in business and make profits on their investments. What the public role of the nobility consists of is what they think they can do in *parlement* and what they think they can do in collecting *taille* for us in local welfare over the opposition of the *Intendant*, who is obliged to send some of it to Paris. Thus these structural concepts – army, mode of production, nobility – have their causal force because they systematically shape people's cognitions.

---

<sup>299</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 118

<sup>300</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 119

Some of this is familiar and some if it seems confused. The examples are helpful if contentious. Stinchcombe's point about armies (in each of the paragraphs I have just quoted) reiterates the idea of 'routine politics' we encountered above. Indeed, it might be seen to offer a little more than a reiteration. While the point is partly the same – that terms like 'army' derive from routine situations – Stinchcombe also seems to suggest that this gives the 'routine' a certain priority over the 'non-routine' in so far as the latter cannot be understood otherwise than as a breakdown of the former. Now, it may be that the dynamic relationship between a pre-civil war and civil war set of politics is an extremely complicated one.<sup>301</sup> Yet, as long as there *is* a relationship this would seem to make the previous, more settled circumstances an essential part of the explanation for what goes on in the war. The non-routine is understood here in a way that is parasitic on the routine – as its *breakdown*.

What 'capitalists cannot help doing if they are to stay in business' is another example of conditional possibility: certain actions of the capitalists are a condition for the set of possibilities implied by the survival of their business. The very existence of the nobility itself depends on its members having a certain view of what it is plausible for them to do in relation to political institutions and tax affairs. They do not face direct coercion into their role, but the force of circumstance means that taking a realistic view involves some compromises. So, one source of possibilities here is the practical reasoning of actors themselves. However, Stinchcombe also finds possibilities in the very logic of sociological concepts: what he calls the 'causal force' of these concepts depends on their being built out of aspects of 'people's cognitions'. Let us examine this.

---

<sup>301</sup> Kalyvas 2006. A major theme of Kalyvas' exhaustively documented analysis is that pre-war alliances can change radically when a civil-war begins and as it progresses; nonetheless, the change from peace to war along certain – perhaps unpredictable lines – is part of the explanation for the distribution of civil-war violence.

The idea of a sociological concept itself having ‘causal force’ seems rather confused. Stinchcombe means that it is a connection with the real concerns of individuals in historical societies which gives sociological concepts some purchase on what here he presumably wishes to call ‘causation’ in these societies. So what he means directly is that things *happen*, or that people *do* things, not that they are *caused* in a sense which adds any depth or generalizability to one’s intuitive grasp of the connection between sequential events. Perhaps unknowingly, Stinchcombe acknowledges the difficulty of speaking simply in terms of ‘causation’ by saying later in *Theoretical Methods in Social History* that we need to chance ‘guesses about the place of particular acts in the causal scheme’.<sup>302</sup> His point is effectively that we cannot get a detailed grasp of fine-grained causation but that we may be able to suggest how acts influence and are influenced by their “causal” surroundings. So, rather than providing a social physics, we are to ask about the connection between the use of mules in yarn production in India and the ‘effect’ this had on the proliferation of weaving factories in Manchester during the industrial revolution. Later we will consider a systematic way to think of this as something rather different to causation; for now, though, consider that all Stinchcombe really needs to say is that ‘history is just one fucking thing after another’, as one of Alan Bennett’s *History Boys* puts it, and that he – Stinchcombe – can make some sort of sense out of why.<sup>303</sup>

What is directly important about Stinchcombe’s rather briefly put view for our concern with possibilities is the idea that possibilities somehow *constitute* and are therefore *implied by* sociological concepts:

The list of bedrock subjective concepts, out of which structural concepts are developed, usually consists of concepts of common-sense psychology: possibility (Can soldiers get

---

<sup>302</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 122-3

<sup>303</sup> Bennett 2006



away with it if they do not fire on the crowd?), constraint (How can a capitalist produce enough yarn?), reward (Will a capitalist make more profit with larger mules with many child-helpers?), effectiveness (Will the village land council let a peasant keep the land he just got?), causality (Did Russia lose to the Germans because of betrayals in the tsar's court?).<sup>304</sup>

Again, the idea of 'causality' here is doubtful: there can be no direct causal link between betrayal and the loss of a war, even if betrayal might be identified as the main factor which explains such a loss best. If instead we are willing to treat the internecine betrayals at the tsar's court as *conditions* of the German victory, there is a case for saying that Stinchcombe identifies *only* modal concepts as the basis for sociological concepts – perhaps despite himself. Betrayal is a condition that makes certain actions leading to victory possible. Continuing peasant ownership is made possible by council decisions. A mode of production is defined by the conditions (particular details of production) which make profit possible. A technique of production is invented in face of a historically limited set of possibilities. Individual soldiers decide whether rebellion is, plausibly, worth the risk. What we learn about by interpreting historical material with sociological concepts, on this view, is the context of possibility within which actors acted. Further commentary below will help us examine the idea that we may take a stronger *interest* in this context of possibilities than in the directly factual material which demonstrates it to us. However, Stinchcombe's notion of structure is as gentle as Redfield's notion of 'system'. It can only be used to sum-up some actions and a situation – not to indicate some sort of independent cause.

Nevertheless, Stinchcombe introduces his thought about possibility as one of his final comments, and consequently he does not develop it very deeply. It is suggestive but not terribly helpful to be told, as Stinchcombe does in summing-up, that Kenneth Burke

---

<sup>304</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 119

described institutions or modes of production as a ‘grammar of motive’.<sup>305</sup>

Stinchcombe is more interested in the *motive* part, because his purpose is to show that structural concepts depend on the subjective realities of the individuals whose action and social life we are trying to explain. Part of his point is that these subjective realities need grasping in a detailed way, and that ‘grand definitions’ in terms of cosmic values (such as a Calvinist ethic *alone*) are not fine grained enough and do not explain why people *keep* acting as they do. The explanatory gap has two aspects. Firstly, the potential of a cosmic value has to earth to become real energy, so we have to explain why it does so in a particular way. Second, it is hard to imagine individuals being motivated by cosmic values alone if they are not filtered through some goals and rewards which are more proximate to them. ‘Grand definitions’ of societies based on sweeping accounts of their values ought to be examined at the level of individuals, their real circumstances, and their actions.<sup>306</sup>

Consequently, Stinchcombe takes us a little closer towards understanding the role of possibilities in sociological concepts. His analysis is more throwaway than Elster’s. Yet, his instinct that we are left without a certain line between the possible and the impossible is a useful caution. He thinks that using sociological concepts like *king*, *kingdom* and *army* means making judgements about the psychology of the people whose behaviour is indicated by such concepts. This tempers Elster’s harder “possibilism”. It offers us the thought that judgements about possibility are built into our use of such concepts and that, thus, we always have to check back with the details to see if we are using them correctly. The concepts themselves cannot themselves show us what is possible or impossible.

---

<sup>305</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 119

<sup>306</sup> Stinchcombe 1978: 119

*Montaillou* contains some sociological concepts, not least *domus/ostal* and *cabanes*. Later we will return to examine how they introduce certain possibilities into the make-up of the book. However, *Montaillou* is not just constituted by sociological concepts. It also contains descriptions of actions, people, and the broader environment in which the village rested. These further elements introduce possibilities into *Montaillou*, but they do so in different ways to sociological concepts. To see how *they* work, and to see how they combine with the more sociological aspects of LeRoy Ladurie's thought, we need to extend our discussion of possibilities to include them. To do so, we can return to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, to Italy and Geoffrey Hawthorn's discussion of the importance of possibilities in understanding the *Maestà*, an altarpiece created by Duccio di Buoninsegna after having been commissioned by the cathedral of Santa Maria in Siena on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1308. This will take us back for a while to the time, if not the place, of *Montaillou*.

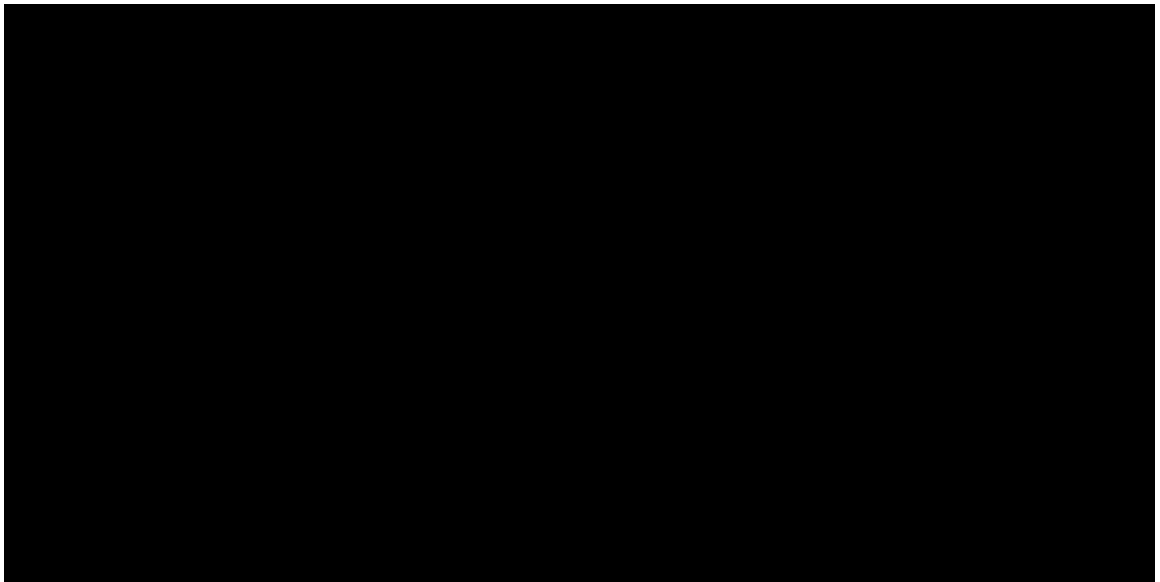
### **18. Hawthorn: possibilities in understanding**

Duccio's *Maestà* can be seen to compete with *Montaillou* across the centuries. It is contemporaneous to LeRoy Ladurie's subject matter, but as imaginative constructions *Montaillou* and the *Maestà* are separated by nearly seven-hundred years. History as such was reinvented in the interim. Nonetheless, the *Maestà*'s function as an altarpiece is fulfilled in virtue of its conveying a view of history. It is painted onto a panel of poplar about five metres square and twenty-three centimetres thick, and is thus fully dramatic.<sup>307</sup> At its centre is the Madonna holding the infant Christ (*figure 4*). Arranged around these central, unrealistically large figures are the apostles amidst a large crowd of other notables. Their eyes are directed to the Madonna and her child. They are all

---

<sup>307</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 127

wearing bold colours – red, gold, blue, Christ in a mild pink with golden embroidery. Each has been given a stamp of divine approval in the form of a golden *nimbus* which allows each of their faces to emerge individually from the gaudily dyed crowd.<sup>308</sup> Further scenes from the life of Christ, with emphasis on the Resurrection, are attached in black-bordered panels originally intended for the back (*figure 5*). The overall effect is to recount a divine history of God’s contact with the world of men.<sup>309</sup> One might even venture to say that it was supposed, like Christ himself, to *destroy* history by swamping it with gold from heaven.



*Figure 4*

---

<sup>308</sup> Carli 1998: 24-27

<sup>309</sup> Figures reproduced from Carli 1998: 28-29ff. Successive pages of Carli 1998 show each panel individually, with some commentary in Italian. Most of the panels come in pairs, offering a representation of a sequence of related events: the cutting-down of Christ from the cross, for instance, leads to his tender burial. While – as Hawthorn discusses – commentators have suggested that the *Maestà* fails in realism, the body of Christ itself seems to have been conveyed with a very realistic sense of its frailty and the pathos it would have for his friends and followers. Bellosi 1999 provides a much more detailed catalogue of all the images, which I have also consulted, but Carli 1998 is a very helpful summary.

Apart from the fact that the Cathars would have hated its insinuation of a hierarchy fixed by the immaculate conception and other rejected miracles, the *Maestà* has enough in common with *Montaillou* to clash with it. *This history definitely* has sides and forms a whole. That, indeed, is the whole point: to collapse various events and individuals into a box of divine victory for the purposes of consumption by the dubiously literate and equally dubiously faithful Sienese. The ordinary world of events is trampled all over here by the transcendental, represented by the lack of clear setting in the central scene and the overwhelming wash of divine gold which binds all the components into a heavenly homogeneity.<sup>310</sup> *Montaillou*, on the other hand, works in precisely the opposite direction, *meticulously* producing a setting and giving final attention to the people who have to live and die in it. No promise of completion is offered and no final message is extracted – neither a religious one nor a social-scientific one. If, finally, we do decide that *Montaillou* is a whole with sides, like the Abbey in *The Name of the Rose* or a Redfieldian ‘system’, it must surely be an impressionistic one of some sort. Despite his desire for a ‘total history’, LeRoy Ladurie has signalled the limitations of whatever whole he has constructed without pretending that it is, in any natural or transcendental sense, *complete*. So, even if one gives a degree of credence to the complaints of Carrard, Burke and Weis about the stereotyped character of the action in *Montaillou* (encountered above), one must at least credit LeRoy Ladurie with having paid an important sort of respect to the individuals whose action he uses by focussing on features of the world which would have mattered to them: their means of life and trade, their houses, their friends and way of meeting them, and the steep slopes down and up which they would have had to move if they were to move at all. There is no final judgement – or presage of historiographical Apocalypse – to render these individuals and the world of their experience unimportant.

---

<sup>310</sup> For the biblical importance of a lack of setting, see Auerbach 2003: 3-23.

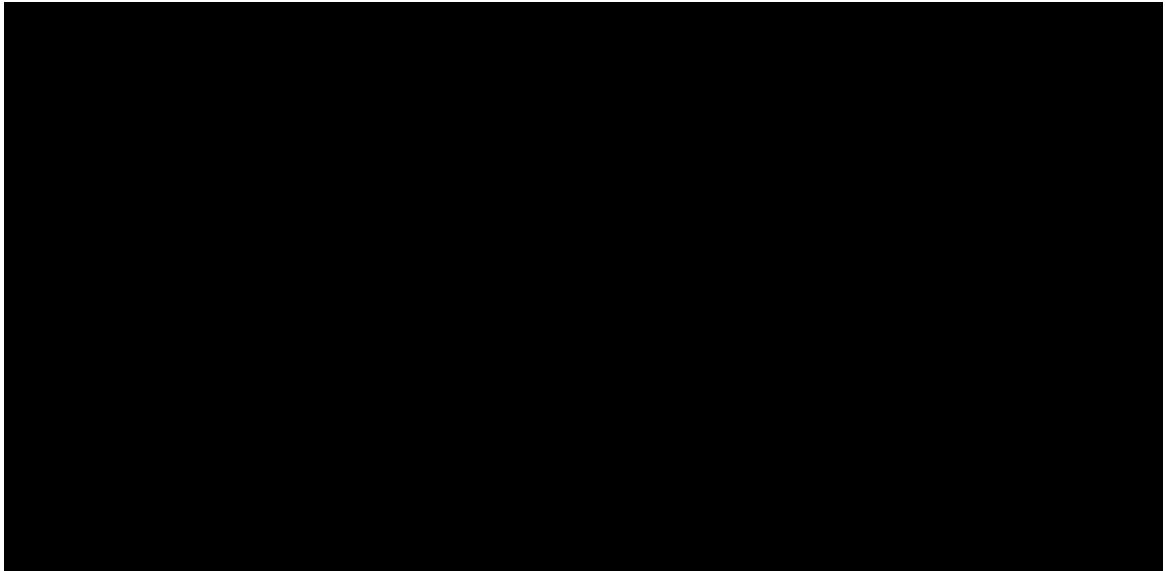


Figure 5

The withholding of final judgement is central to Hawthorne's vision of the role of possibilities in *Plausible Worlds*, where he discusses Duccio's *Maestà*. The *Maestà* itself features as a final and deepening example in his attempt to show us that possibilities, as he puts it, increase under explanation. His two previous examples – fluctuations in levels of plague and fertility in early modern Europe, the involvement of the United States in the Korean War in the 1950s – reveal what might be seen as a less avowedly systematic but nevertheless comparable picture to Elster's possibilism. At the heart of Hawthorne's ideas about possibility are two paradoxes. First, that the range of possibilities we have to consider increases radically when we try to understand and explain the actual. The reason is precisely that we are faced with a singular phenomenon: something which has actually happened or happens. To understand this, for Hawthorne, is to understand why *this* happened and not a range of things which could have happened, but did not. Things could have turned out differently in a causal way or people might have made different decisions. Second, as we multiply possibilities in an attempt to understand the context in which the actual event emerged, we are forced to

speculate somewhat beyond the direct evidence. Consequently, that our understanding of the actual rests on judgements of plausibility, which are far from cut and dried, means that – as Hawthorn puts it – as we understand more we come to *know* less.<sup>311</sup>

Our historical understanding of plague, for instance, relies on some causal information about the way the plague bacillus is transmitted between people and among species. Yet, we also need to know what people could have done in the affected towns and cities, in terms of public health policy. We need know all of these things to understand plague *historically*. The bacillus was not an unstoppable force, as Hawthorn marshals various successful policies against it to show, so the causal aspect is necessarily filtered through our appreciation for what people could have done to stop or divert its transmission. Yet, considering such questions means taking a broader grasp of a city like Orvieto, for instance, in an attempt to understand what it would have been *plausible* to try to do given the residents' state of knowledge, but also given the likely state of control they would have had over their population socio-politically. Might they, for instance, have managed to cordon off the city, stopping its rich citizens fleeing and spreading the plague even further? The difficulty with these sorts of judgements, and the reason why Hawthorn writes in terms of *plausibility* and not the more philosophically precise sounding *possibility*, is that we are uncertain about them because they did not happen. Nonetheless, to grasp the choices of historical actors requires seeing that they had a limited range of other options available to them. History thus becomes an imaginative work of increasing modesty and reserve: 'success in history and the social sciences, as perhaps in life itself, consists in understanding more and knowing less'.<sup>312</sup>

Some of Hawthorn's claims about possibility suggest theoretical kinship with Elster and Stinchcombe. Elster's possibilism – if you recall – consisted in finding an independent

---

<sup>311</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 1-37.

<sup>312</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 37; for the plague, see Hawthorn 1991: 38-61.

role for possibilities in explanation. Hawthorn would be familiar with his attempt to explain social mobility or kinship in terms of broader situations of possibility in which the single line actually taken through the world has to be seen against the background of an agent's 'adjacent' or 'reachable' states. Elster, of course, was interested in situations where the 'halo of possibility' surrounding an individual could be described somewhat systematically, which is what led Bernard Williams to say that sometimes he over-did the formal side of his analyses. The precision offered by Elster probably covers-up the degree to which the judgements of possibility he relies on are uncertain. His distinction between routine and non-routine politics, for example, required we draw a very sharp line between the possible and the impossible. Stinchcombe, by contrast, was duly cautious in suggesting that the possibilistic judgements implied in our usages of sociological concepts are essentially 'guesses', but – partly in virtue of the fact that possibility was not Stinchcombe's central concern – he does not offer a broader discussion for why. Hawthorn gives us a more extensive, less intuitive, explanation for why dealing with possibilities requires our modesty. Not only are we dealing with possibilities which did not happen and for which we lack direct evidence, we are also dealing with complex relationships between factual circumstances, individual decisions, and the reliance of these individual decisions on cooperation from what is sometimes an enormous range of other individuals.

Think, for instance, of the incredible number of people who had to be convinced, cajoled, or coerced into maintaining a *cordon sanitaire* against the spread of plague from the East into Western Europe, when the Habsburgs instituted the *Pestpatente* between 1728 and 1770.<sup>313</sup> Not only did this scale of policy rest on an authority available only in a peace established in 1719, it also encompassed and disrupted the lives of thousands of people by making a cut across a 1900 kilometre stretch of settled

---

<sup>313</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 53



life and mobile trade. It is hard to imagine a similar imposition being accepted in earlier years of pestilence in the early medieval Justinian plague of 541-542CE, when – as Chris Wickham tells us in *Framing the Early Middle Ages* – Roman authority had collapsed into a network of varied local arrangements.<sup>314</sup> And, as we have seen, by the *quattrocento* the Church was still battling heretics and trying to bring the cities into some sort of order of Christendom/Europe/Empire, so the plagues of the late 1300s would have been dealt with under arrangements only a little better than *ad hoc*, compared to the Habsburgs. There is an absence, in these cases, of a closed unit of possibilities apt for Elster’s sort of possibilistic analysis, so we are left ‘guessing’ with Stinchcombe and imagining the historical plausibility of various courses of action with Hawthorn.<sup>315</sup> What we reach for is not a machine-like system of possibilities, but rather as many particular facts as possible. However, despite these epistemological differences, each of Elster, Stinchcombe and Hawthorn adheres to “possibilism” in so far as they see an independent role for possibilities in *explanation*.

What Hawthorn’s discussion of the *Maestà* adds, however, is the thought that epistemological differences in our treatment of possibilities cannot necessarily be fully partitioned away from more substantial matters – like the area behind the organ in a modern church, which sometimes hides that no one is really *playing* the organ, just winding a handle. Hawthorn takes issue with the way the *Maestà* has been interpreted, and he thinks that the mistakes art historians have made owe to their lack of

---

<sup>314</sup> Wickham 2005

<sup>315</sup> Elster himself has suggested that using systematic analyses in less systematic surroundings infects any resultant explanation with intolerable uncertainty, but Anna Alexandrova has suggested an ‘open formulae’ approach to combining systematic and non-systematic (‘narrative’) elements in ‘analytic narratives’. The basic idea is quasi-Weberian: unrealistic, systematic models can still explain, and they can be constructed from realistic materials drawn unsystematic circumstances. Alexandrova’s example is the race between the British and French to Fashoda in 1898. While the general circumstances are best summed-up in a narrative, the logic of the precise clash-point is open to game-theoretic analysis; see Alexandrova 2009.

appreciation for the way judgements of plausibility enter *into* our vision of what the *Maestà* is and therefore the standards against which what it could have been, or *ought* to have been, might be judged.<sup>316</sup> With painting, he suggests – as perhaps with politics – possibilistic explanations spill over into possibilistic descriptions when the viewer really tries to *understand* rather than impose standards bought-in from elsewhere. The historiography of the *Maestà* begins in this unsympathetic vein, he suggests, when Vasari brought a Florentine's eye to the Sienese altarpiece, and found it lacking (to the extent to which he bothered with it at all).<sup>317</sup>

Perhaps things have not gotten much better since *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects from Cimabue to Our Times* in the 1500s.

Duccio has been seen at once too generally and too partially. He has been seen in the general sweep of Italian painting to at least the sixteenth century, if not indeed in the sweep of all painting to the late nineteenth. He has also been seen (except by the modernists) as though the only issue in painting between the thirteenth and the nineteenth was the issue of realism. The *Maestà*, however, was conceived by someone who could have had no idea of what sixteenth-century skills and sensibilities, let alone our own, would be. And like all thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century paintings in Italy, his *Maestà* was not just a painting. It was not done just to be seen in and for itself, in the way in which we would now see such a work, on a wall or some other plain plane surface, isolated in its frame and aesthetically self-standing. It was an altarpiece.<sup>318</sup>

So, getting at the *Maestà* itself requires demolishing some of the screens in its historiography. What is destroyed is an *implausible* construal, not of what the painting itself looks like, but of the world of possibilities into which it was born. Later

---

<sup>316</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 124

<sup>317</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 132

<sup>318</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 142

obsessions with realism, which later modernists (like Merleau-Ponty after Cézanne) would decry as an academic dogma, seem to have *closed* the real world of the *Maestà* without considering that it might have been more open than a jingoistic Florentine could have conceived.

This corresponds to Panofsky's scheme of interpretation in *Studies in Iconology* (1939), where eventually one turns to deal with the historical layer of meaning in a painting:

INTRINSIC MEANING OR CONTENT: It is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitudes of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion. Needless to say, these principles are manifested by, and therefore throw light on, both 'compositional methods' and 'iconographical significance'. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for instance (the earliest example can be dated around 1310), the traditional type of the Nativity with the Virgin Mary reclining in bed or on a couch was frequently replaced by a new one which shows the Virgin kneeling before the child in adoration. From a compositional point of view this change means, roughly speaking, the substitution of a triangular scheme for a rectangular one; from an iconographical point of view in the narrower sense of the term, it means the introduction of a new theme textually formulated by such writers as Pseudo-Bonaventura and St. Bridget. But at the same time it reveals a new emotional attitude peculiar to the later phases of the Middle Ages.<sup>319</sup>

The change Panofsky is describing dates very similarly to the *Maestà*, commissioned in 1308. Panofsky shows us that Hawthorn's interpretation corrects Vasari and others at deeply historical layer, though the adjustment is not a merely historical one. Adopting it will change how the viewer sees the lower level details which, although the larger bones in their skeletons may remain, will be given significantly different textures. To see that the place of the Virgin Mother in Nativity scenes from c.1310 onwards is

---

<sup>319</sup> Panofsky 1972 [1939]: 7

significantly more humble – a moderating response, perhaps, to the cultish enthusiasms her figure had encouraged in Orthodox Christianity (especially in quasi-pagan Lithuania) – *is* partly to be sensitive to the change in compositional scheme from the triangular to the rectangular. To be sensitive to the emotional intensity of the *Maestà* involves seeing it as more than a bit of conservative symbolism, artistically falling behind the new realism. It may instead involve seeing this conservatism as a highly emotional attachment to a routine mode of life in Siena. The *Maestà* is one window into that mode.

It is therefore, ironically, a deficiency of *historical* realism which has distorted the *Maestà*'s reception. However, Hawthorn suggests that when we try to build the picture back up to its full historicity, the demolition done, no *single* correcting vision is available. The obsession with realism can, though, be replaced, partly in view of Duccio's favouring flatter, more symbolical arrangements than the oblique<sup>320</sup> and allegedly 'realistic' perspectives pushed in Florence (e.g. by Cimabue). The replacement would be a more sensitive appreciation for Duccio's more likely concern to strike churchgoers with values of 'immediacy' and 'spirituality'.<sup>321</sup> As Hawthorn explains (and as is reflected in *The Name of the Rose* and the early history of the Cathars, which I discuss above), in 1215 the Roman Church had placed a new emphasis on the visual in light of their new determination to communicate the presence of Christ in the liturgy.<sup>322</sup> Another explanation which suggests itself is that, as with the Cathars,

---

<sup>320</sup> The oblique is where an object is made to appear coming out of the painting by placing – for instance – the two sides of a building at forty-five degrees from the horizontal. One is thus struck by a *corner*, or a facial bulge, in three dimensions.

<sup>321</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 147. Hawthorn alludes to Elster here – but not *Logic and Society* – in suggesting that if one were to treat Duccio as 'maximizing' anything it would be these aesthetico-religious values. Clearly, he thinks this is an exaggeration, and I take it he only thinks it is useful in getting rid of the previous obsession with realism. His own instinct is, as I explain, much more particular. It is a shame Hawthorn did not discuss *Logic and Society*, which is both a direct competitor and yet sometimes a potential aid to his own enterprise in *Plausible Worlds*.

<sup>322</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 128-9, 147

Franciscans and Poor Clares, and others, the wave of highly emotional lay spiritual movements and ‘heresies’, which rolled from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, represented a form of emotional competition to Rome (and sometimes Avignon). Consistently a religion of words, the Church nevertheless needed a way to get people to shut up and listen.

Cue Duccio. The condition of his painting the *Maestà* was overwhelmingly one of constraint. He was constrained by the terms of his commission, and the fact that he was running a workshop, often in debt. It was thus not open to Duccio to abandon himself to either purely aesthetic or purely religious motivations for painting, and he always had to keep half an eye on his customers. All artists would have had to have done some of this, but Duccio seems to have been particularly precarious and therefore markedly open to financial worries affecting his artistic choices. Nevertheless, he did achieve something of extraordinary power within the confines of relative unfreedom and a need to get the job done. Yet what he achieved – through his brushes, his workshop and his multiple underlings – is difficult to summarize in more exacting terms, and Hawthorn proposes this an object lesson for his view that as we know more, so we know less; and as we understand more, multiplying possibilities, so our knowledge of the phenomenon itself becomes less certain.

Within the dimensions of immediacy and spirituality, there is an entire range of possibilities. It seems to have been open to Duccio to paint more realistically like Giotto, but his need to excite certain feelings in churchgoers rather than keep-up with the (alleged) cutting edge in art history explain, perhaps, why he did not.<sup>323</sup> Hawthorn suggests five possibilities as a web within which to catch the *Maestà*:

---

<sup>323</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 148

First, Duccio was not interested in realism. Or he was, but decided that its demands conflicted with others, which took priority. Or he wishes to distance himself from Cimabue and Giotto. Or he did not, and if Cimabue or someone else, painting in a more naturalistic manner, had received the Dominicans' commission in 1285 [for another piece], he would have tried to adapt his style. Or Cimabue himself, failing to get this commission, failing to get this commission, decided to adapt.<sup>324</sup>

Hawthorn tells us that the evidence cannot determine which of these possibilities regarding Duccio's relationship to the "market" for painting is true, if any. His point, though, is that maintaining *all* of them, in so far as they are partially supported by evidence (which we will not go into here) enriches our view of the *Maestà*.

On this view, we do not decide upon an interpretation as if it were a theory, but instead lean this way and that as if we were trying to look around something – and all five angles have us see different things. In part, we see a compromise which might be the result of competition between artists – an attempt to impress the customers and, by extension, the consumers. This, of course, is an exaggeration itself, because it is unlikely that Duccio could have parsed his economic motivations away, entirely, from his attachment to Siena and his lifelong "investment" in being one of its citizens. In so far as Duccio's apparently conservative, non-realistic style was favoured, one must see in it not just the restraint and – probably – constraint of a single man, but also a reflection of Siena's sense of self and – probably – something like its collective piety. Resistance to a new style shows us something of an attachment to the old, and seeing *this* gives us some sense of what it might have been like to have a highly emotional attachment to some particular ways of representing the liturgy and sacraments. We achieve a kind of historical realism in probing, from various angles: at one moment we glimpse flashes of a form of economic competition which seems familiar and modern;

---

<sup>324</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 151

at other points we, still unsurely and inexactly, see the *Maestà* opening out onto a wider and highly unfamiliar world of religious belief and city- rather than national-attachment, mediated through complicated alliances with different parties trying to control the church. The richer the historical picture, the greater the number of possibilities and possible angles we can entertain. If one looks across to Montaillou for example, at the time of the commission in 1308, one is reminded that the restriction to nature (as we see it) in the works of Cimabue and Giotto had to compete with a world where the golden *nimbuses* around the heads of those assembled around the central Madonna with child represented something real, or perhaps hyper-real, for ordinary people in their daily lives. The *Maestà* satisfied a world where the souls indicated by the *nimbus*, and its divine source, were real enough to be worth putting considerable effort into saving, even if this meant burning the body which (sometimes, depending on your favour with the Church) threatened to corrupt it. Such a vision was itself, of course, subject to worldly corruption.

Hawthorn is interested in the broader point that such possibilities are *constitutive* of our vision, and more generally our understanding. He might have gone further in his discussion of the relationship between Duccio's painting and the dogmas of realism, because what he says (and I have added some additional considerations) suggests that the category of 'realism' is much more historically varied than it is allowed to be if it is fixed to mean 'correct perspective' – a fixed idea of what is visually realistic. Merleau-Ponty rejects correct perspective as reflecting even ordinary experience, never mind the inventions of artists.<sup>325</sup> The impossibility of a fixed concept of (literary) realism is also the presupposition of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, whose multiple commentaries in the absence of a theory serve to demonstrate the variety of what people in different times and places

---

<sup>325</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1964 and above.

have treated as convincing.<sup>326</sup> We cannot get into a full discussion of the nature of realism here; but Hawthorn's discussion of Duccio suggests that *any* attempt to see a portion of history through a single, monolithic category – like *realism*, but also perhaps more sociological categories like *capitalism* – are bound to fail unless their purpose is to multiply rather than close down the range of possibilities we can consider as being characteristic of that time and place. Such concepts, quite as Stinchcombe says so briefly, seem not to give us resting places but rather to push us on to further considerations. Hawthorn treats the *Maestà* as a somewhat exceptional category in this regard because the meaning of aesthetic objects seem to him to be constituted by possibilities. They – as it were – suck in aspects of the world of which they are created a part, unlike more self-evident phenomena which we are warranted in taking for granted as factual, like the spread of plague.

However, Hawthorn admits that aesthetic objects may not be the only historical phenomena where description, understanding, and explanation are all wrapped-up together in an essentially possibilistic package. He admits, for instance, that politics is a borderline case, because while basic aspects of politics like 'Jim voted Trump' – and what voting *is* – do not require rich (or 'thick'<sup>327</sup>) descriptions like the *Maestà* does, terms like 'democracy' probably represent multiple possibilities in a similar way.<sup>328</sup> However, Hawthorn provides little support for this distinction, in much the same way as Elster distinguishes rather arbitrarily between routine and non-routine politics. With Stinchcombe we saw the beginnings of a view where sociological concepts themselves are in fact constituted by judgements of possibility, ridding us of the need for Elster's arbitrary distinction. Hawthorn gives us an extension of this idea, explaining more fully why introducing possibilities into the very heart of the historical imagination at the

---

<sup>326</sup> See Auerbach 2003

<sup>327</sup> Geertz 1973. See below.

<sup>328</sup> Hawthorn 1991: 124



same time requires a cautious modesty in maintaining a variety of possible ways of seeing. One might suggest he be equally cautious, for instance, about his distinction between things like democracies on one hand and things like voting on the other.

To maintain such a distinction requires judging that the possibilities are sufficiently curtailed to allow that marking a piece of paper *will* have a certain political significance. It involves judging, for instance, that the paper has been supplied and will be counted within a *democracy*. However reasonable such a judgement appears, it still implies a judgement of what, plausibly, will happen to the piece of paper once Jim has marked it. Sometimes the routine of democracy fails, though not in a way unique to democracies. Consider the orders of King Louis Phillipe (written on other, absolutist pieces of paper) to suppress political disorder following an anti-royalist banquet on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1848.<sup>329</sup> The army was called and expected, but it had crumbled in mutiny beneath the paper. With it (as one says to gloss over a very complex sequence of events) fell Metternich's post-Bonapartist arrangement for Europe. For a farcically brief period, it looked like Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna had all been for nothing, though notoriously the barricades of 1848 never became a routine.<sup>330</sup> Each larger-scale judgement about a regime implies smaller-scale ones about plausible sequences of actions. No categorical distinction between this layering of judgements in political sociology and the richer judgements one might reach about the *Maestà* is available.

\*

So far, then, we have been able to take various lessons from previous work on possibilities in history and social science. Elster offers a fairly systematic exposition of

---

<sup>329</sup> Davies 1997: 803

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Marx 1994: 188

possibilism. Stinchcombe suggests very briefly that the possibilistic aspect may inhere in the very nature of sociological concepts, and he *hints* that they require judgemental not systematic application. Hawthorn gives us an extended picture, saying more about what it is for our views of historical phenomena – and not just ones apprehended sociologically – to be constituted by judgements about possibilities. He demonstrates at length how this can be so. He also introduces a note of caution or scepticism which seems to be an essential safety-measure when we are dealing with possibilities so directly. Some possibilities, however, remain to be addressed before we return to confront *Montaillou* again. One is that while the foregoing suggests that possibilities can work in these ways, we are no further forward with the idea that this might shed some light on a particular work of social history *not* conducted in explicitly possibilistic terms. What we need to show is that finding such a central role for possibilities in the historical imagination enables a kind of analysis which puts the possibilistic reader in contact with previously unnoticed ways of interpreting historiography. One might hope, of course, that such interpretations would turn out to be interesting by the standards of the text – *Montaillou* – and not just of theory.

Up to now, possibilities have been treated as *instruments* for apprehending reality, even when they are used to make lenses to help us see reality from different angles. Even with Hawthorn's discussion of Duccio we still seem to be held in tension, in that intermediate state described by Brother William – by his (Hawthorn's) five ways of seeing the place of the *Maestà* in the 1200s and 1300s. I think we can push the role of possibilities further. However fully possibilities are put to work in the ways we have been discussing, we are still guided by anticipation for the real object of concern – Brunellus, the horse itself. But I will suggest that we should rid ourselves of this anticipation and instead consider that what we really want out of history lies *essentially* in the 'intermediate' position. It is not a limbo reserved for artists. We should – I will

suggest – consider ourselves to be learning about possibilities directly, not as intermediaries for a more satisfying reality. This is a sweeping reversal of common sense, admittedly. However, I will try to show that it does not just solve some theoretical puzzles. It also helps us better to understand how the elements constituting *Montaillou* fit together to produce a reading-experience so full of human interest – so full of *action* of various sorts. I begin the next part of the thesis (IV) by offering a ‘possibilistic’ way to extend Frank Ankersmit’s theory of historical representation; subsequent chapters provide analytical ways to specify a relationship between actions and possibilities in history. The ultimate goal, of course, is to create some theoretical instruments to help us see this ‘possibilistic’ dimension of history in *Montaillou*, but – like many a medieval quest – the way back home involves overcoming considerable trials.

## ***PART FOUR: ANALYSIS OF ACTION IN HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS***

### **19. Modality, Monadology, and *Montaillou***

#### *i. Introduction*

In stanza XXVII of the alliterative poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, dating to the fourteenth-century and originally composed in Middle English by an author who we cannot now name, Gawain is described as wearing the sign of the pentangle. The anonymous author uses this as a figure for the unified, virtuous character of the knight, highlighting his perfect and unbreakable combination of Liberality, Loving-kindness, Contenance, Courtesy and Piety:

These pure five  
Were more firmly fixed on that fine man  
Than on any other, and every multiple,  
Each interlocking with another, had no end,  
Being fixed to five points which never failed,  
Never assembling on one side, nor sundering either,  
With no end at any angle; nor can I find where the design started  
Or proceeded to its end.<sup>331</sup>

The individual virtues and their combined virtuousness are represented by formal and physical properties. Formally, we have number (five), symmetry ('never assembling on

---

<sup>331</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: 1959, 49-50

one side'), infinity ('no end'), and unity ('nor sundering either'). Physically, or perhaps even mechanically, we have the fixed 'interlocking' angles with their unfailing points. The pentangular representation shows us the *formal* unity of Gawain's character. Clearly, however, this virtuous character also consists in physical actions where the formal, moral properties of Gawain manifest. The five points do not fail, on any given occasion, because of the interlocking of the virtues. Gawain's entire constitution contributes to his steadiness at the lance.<sup>332</sup> Not only is there a moral unity in the diversity of Gawain's actions, the unity of the pentangle itself as a representation is a 'unification' of the 'diversity' of Gawain's many deeds.<sup>333</sup>

Frank Ankersmit has claimed a similar representational unity for works of history understood as *historical representations*. His theory of this is one of the most philosophically involved attempts to justify a version of a doctrine which has been in the ascendancy in the philosophy of history since the 1970s: narrativism or (more fundamentally) representationalism.<sup>334</sup> According to representationalism, works of history are essentially representations. If we add the thought that such representations are essentially narrative, we get narrativism. To analyse the notion of representation, Ankersmit has drawn substantially on the later metaphysical system of Leibniz as presented in 'The Principles of Philosophy', more commonly known as 'The Monadology' (1714).<sup>335</sup> As with Gawain and the pentangle of knightly virtues, here I want to suggest that the potential historiographical value in Ankersmit's appeal to the

---

<sup>332</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 72-74 (stanzas XLIX and L).

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Ricoeur 1983: 9-10.

<sup>334</sup> Ankersmit 2012; and 2001, 1994, 1983. There are, of course, other 'representationalists' or 'narrativists': see for examples White 1973 and Ricoeur 1983-1985. Ankersmit used to write about 'narrative substances' but now he discusses 'historical representations'; here I have emphasised what I take to be the strong continuity in the essentials of his thinking.

<sup>335</sup> See Leibniz [1714] 1989: 213-224 for an English translation and Leibniz 1991 for a parallel French text.

Monadology lies in what it might reveal about the place of *action* in historical representations.

So far, I do not think that Ankersmit has articulated how his formal monadological theory relates to the *content* of works of history. Once, in answer to a question from Marek Tamm, Ankersmit suggests that Leibniz' *monads*, and therefore his own *historical representations*, 'can be rescued from complete isolation' if we see that they are compatible with the 'relational facts' that sustain phenomena.<sup>336</sup> Yet never has he made an attempt is made to make more of this, to provide a principled and illuminating linkage with the details – the 'phenomena' – of historiography. Consequently, it is hard to see what is essentially historical or historiographical in his theory of representation. The problem with this in turn is that it makes it difficult to derive any insights about particular examples of historiography. Yet, while Ankersmit might argue that generality is in the nature of his approach (see below), I think the gap can be bridged. My main proposal is that Ankersmit's theory can be extended to make a connection with *action* clear by treating historical representations as necessarily historical in virtue of being representations of historically specific *situations*. The most important sort of 'relational facts' in history are features of situations which alter the ranges of possible actions which seem to characterise the time and place. A more intuitive and less ambitious version of this idea is available in relation to the moral representation of Gawain.

Gawain's virtuous and apparently pentangular character consists in his deeds and in the significance of his quest, and any light the representation offers depends on this connection. However, to grasp what the author of *Sir Gawain* says about Gawain by

---

<sup>336</sup> Ankersmit & Tamm 2016: 506

employing such a representation is not just to grasp what he (Gawain) actually did. It is to be in possession of a representation which grounds expectations about the relevant range of possibilities for his action – the parameters within which he acts. The significance of what he actually does is at least partially to be found in what it tells us about what he *might* do. Whatever situation Gawain is put in, we expect him not to run away; if he becomes hungry, we expect him not to steal from the poor – *noblesse oblige*. This moral representation of Gawain the individual is consistent with a range of possible actions, but this range (however impossible it is to finish listing everything in it) has limits. To grasp the representation is to have a sense – however intuitive – of these limits, and consequently of the ranges of possible actions characteristic of Gawain. I think Ankersmitian historical representation achieves something similar. Yet, the central difference is that historiography is concerned with the possibilities characteristic of historically specific situations and contexts instead of the moral character of a single man – whom at any rate in this case is mythological.

Perhaps a particular action of Gawain's is explained, morally, by the representation: he acts thusly *because* he is thus. This sort of explanation works by *subsuming* some particulars (e.g. actions) under a more general concept (e.g. of Gawain's character). Philosophers of history have sometimes suggested that this is how narratives perform an explanatory operation.<sup>337</sup> The problem is that in the absence of a very resolute psychological theory his *being thus* is hard to separate from his *acting thusly*, so the sort of representation we have of his character is something more suggestive and less explicit than a fully perspicacious concept or a complete theory.<sup>338</sup> Ankersmit accepts the same point for statements in a historical representation.<sup>339</sup> The narrow moral

---

<sup>337</sup> Ricoeur 1983: 286-301; also McDonald & MacDonald 2011: 136-7 in Tucker 2011.

<sup>338</sup> A classic statement of this issue in virtue ethics is McDowell 1979: 331-50.

<sup>339</sup> Ankersmit 2012: 66

representation of Gawain (the pentangle) is dependent on the broader representation of his actions in the rest of *Sir Gawain*. Indeed, each and every action of Gawain's there testifies to his character. We might, of course, get engrossed in the details of the narrative – *Sir Gawain* is a medieval “page-turner” – but each episode in the quest of Gawain elucidates the representation of his moral character. Each action, then, has a double function. It has a *narrative* function in so far as it takes place in sequence with other events. It also has what we might call a *constitutive* function in so far as it contributes to our sense of the individual character involved in the narrative. As the narrative progresses, new actions are added to the constitution of Gawain's character. As more *actually* happens in the narrative, our sense of what *could* happen changes as well: the more we learn about Gawain's character, the more we grasp what he *might* do. The pentangle is there precisely to remind us that Gawain has multiple capacities and firm limits in his action; this is what his virtuousness consists in. A moral representation of this sort is therefore integrally connected with a particular sort of *content*: Gawain's actions, possible and actual.

Here I want to explore a similar line of development for Ankersmit's conception of *historical* representation. The matter is of course much more complex when we lack a single person whose moral character we are focussed on. Nonetheless, some of the same starting-points apply already given Ankersmit's theory. As I will explain in more detail below, Ankersmit thinks all the statements in a work of history contribute to the historical representation it carries. He appeals to Leibniz for an account of exactly how this works (more on this below). Just like Gawain's actions, even though each statement carries us further through the narrative of the text, simultaneously it also carries out its constitutive function in relation to the overall representation. The only trouble I see with this is that we lack an intuitive analogy for the moral character or *soul* of Gawain for the more complex and multi-actor historical situations that works of



history are typically written about – and which provide the content for historical representations, in Ankersmit's terms. Below, I will use a brief example from *Montaillou*. As we have seen, there LeRoy Ladurie conveys the daily life and historical situation of about two-hundred and fifty people over thirty years, analysing things like sexual relations, forms of labour, individual personalities, the impact of inquisition, and the place of women. Can such a book itself really have a single unified soul, as Ankersmit thinks it must?

In Ankersmit's theory, a given historical representation is an invisible posit enabling a much more general view of historiographical truth and knowledge (more on this below too). Yet, if we can find a way to carry-over the other features of Gawain's character through its moral representation, then we will have found a way to make these posits *visible* – to show that Ankersmit's theory has substantial consequences for how we are to understand the details represented in historiography. This includes the centrality of *action* to historical representations, and the importance of *possibilities* and *limits* in the constitution of the representation – all features, at least, of *Gawain's* moral character.

To support my proposal for supplementing Ankersmit's theory, I offer the following phases of discussion. First, I introduce the core of Ankersmit's representationalism in relation to Leibniz (§2). Next, there is a preliminary I need to mention briefly in advance of my own suggestions (§3): I show that despite some received ideas about Leibniz, the ideas about action and possibilities I rely on are not ruled-out by Ankersmit's dependence on the Monadology. After this, I argue that there is room for judging Ankersmit's theory by independent – non-Leibnizian – criteria in the philosophy of history, and I offer an account of the relevant criteria (§4). According to these criteria, in addition to Ankersmit's formal theory of representation, we also need to establish a *principled argument* connecting this theory with real historiography and a

*demonstration* of how this argument applies. This is what I aim to provide. My principled argument (§5) shows how the formal properties of historical representations enable them to represent highly complex situations where historically characteristic possibilities for action are grounded in multiple and mutually dependent conditions. I then demonstrate how this argument applies in an idealised case (§6) before turning to show how it applies in the same way but more complexly in a real case: *Montaillou* (§7). I conclude by highlighting a novel consequence of my extension of Ankersmit's theory which would reward further attention (§8): *event-condition duality* for actions in historiography, where actions are at once events in themselves *and* conditional contributions to historically specific situations. Later I offer some more precise ways to think about this 'duality' and why it is important. My main effort to begin with, however, is devoted to extending Ankersmit's particular version of representationalism. Further issues are isolated for discussion in subsequent sections.

## *ii. Ankersmit and the Monadology*

Sometimes Ankersmit's ideas are cited to support general positions about the status of historical knowledge or the nature of historical truth.<sup>340</sup> His own recent work has encouraged this, confronting major themes in philosophy of language, epistemology, and aesthetics with his alternative representationalist theory.<sup>341</sup> Here I want to put such cataclysms aside and focus on the details – and potential – of Ankersmit's notion of representation itself. Leibniz' theory of *monads* has helped Ankersmit to explain his

---

<sup>340</sup> See 2011 Southgate: 540, 548 in Tucker 2011; the extent to which Ankersmit is really a 'postmodernist' as Southgate suggests – whatever that really means – is I think still in doubt: see Saari 2005: 5-21 and Ankersmit's reply, Ankersmit 2005: 23-33.

<sup>341</sup> Ankersmit 2012: chp. 4 *et passim*

novel view of what a historical representation is.<sup>342</sup> Leibniz proposed that the basic substances of the God-created universe are *monads*. A *monad* is taken to be a perceiving and perfectly individual substance constituting a point of view in the universe. Composites of *monads* are then interrelated through mutual perception.<sup>343</sup> Sometimes a single *monad* dominates others in a composite. Such composites form the phenomena which we ordinarily take to be real, such as physical objects and individual creatures (people and animals). Yet, the difficulty of the *monad* concept has sustained Leibniz scholarship since his death in 1716, and a brief summary is likely to give a false – or at least premature – impression about the clarity of the concept itself and the unanimity to be found among its interpreters.<sup>344</sup>

Nonetheless, there is at least one very clear analogy between Ankersmit's conception of *historical representations* and Leibniz' theory of *monads*. A *monad* is a basic individual, and in so far as it exists God has given it a 'Complete Individual Concept'<sup>345</sup> containing all its predicates. The *monad* giving the essential identity of a person, for instance, will be defined by the Complete Individual Concept containing the predicates expressing what ordinarily we would think of as the actions and accidents of the person's course through life. Similarly, for Ankersmit a *historical representation* is a 'strong individual' defined by a Complete Individual Concept formed of all the

---

<sup>342</sup> Ankersmit's mentions of Leibniz, while frequent enough to make documenting them unnecessary, are often elusive. For example, neither *Meaning, Truth, and Reference* nor a recent article involves any explicit references to Leibniz own writing despite him being named as the source of various ideas. See Ankersmit 2013: esp. 406-11. A certain amount of exegetical reconstruction is therefore required. The idea of the 'Complete Individual Concept' which I focus on here as the core of Ankersmit's theory captures something present in the *Monadology* (see §11) and the 'Discourse on Metaphysics' (§§8, 9) – for the latter see Leibniz 1989: 40-42. That Ankersmit depends on Leibniz is not in doubt, and in at least one place he expressly associates Leibniz' philosophy with the theory of monads or 'monadology'; see Ankersmit & Tamm 2016: 502.

<sup>343</sup> See Crane 2017: 89-95.

<sup>344</sup> I mention some recent interpretations below.

<sup>345</sup> This is a conventional phrase for something Leibniz himself expressed in multiple ways.

statements contained in a work of history.<sup>346</sup> For Ankersmit, statements in a work of history are predicates of the historical representation it offers. Together they define a *monad*-esque individual. In neither case – Leibniz nor Ankersmit – do we have a unitary individual independently of its predicates.<sup>347</sup> The main consequence of Ankersmit's adopting this view as a theory of *historiography* is that statements no longer function in historiography as separable, individual claims about the past. Rather, each of them contributes to the definition of a holistic historical representation which is 'about' the past. The core of Ankersmit's view is that in history we always construct a representation of this sort, and that we never get at the past directly – as if quotidian linguistic structures in the present were simply to be reproduced when we talk about the historical past.<sup>348</sup>

Ankersmit explains that his sort of representation is no longer a two-place operation, as in the way we might think of a declarative utterance (*p*) bearing a representational relationship ( $R^2$ ) with its truth-makers (*t*):  $R^2pt$ . Ankersmit thinks this sort of description involving reference fails to provide a good model for how we represent history. Rather, every statement in a work of history becomes a predicate of the historical representation, now understood as an intermediary component (*r*) in a three-place operation of representation ( $R^3$ ). For any *p*, representation can now be understood as: *r is p about the past*. I have underlined the relations involved in the operation. The is indicates the 'is' of predication, and this captures Ankersmit's view that all the statements of a work of history come together in the same, very precisely defined historical representation. The Complete Individual Concept for a given historical representation will look like this: *r is p<sup>1</sup>...p<sup>x</sup> about the past*. But *what about* the past is

---

<sup>346</sup> Ankersmit 2013

<sup>347</sup> Catherine Wilson disputes this with regard to some contexts: see e.g. Wilson 2001.

<sup>348</sup> I put aside the issue of whether we can have a historical understanding of the present.

represented? Well, Ankersmit is committed to saying that we cannot define this independently of a historical representation, so the aboutness relation involves what he calls ‘speaking about speaking’. To talk about the content of the representation, we either mention the predicates of the representation itself –  $p^l \dots p^x$  – or perhaps, try to describe this set in looser terms. (“Well, really it’s about social reconstruction after the Justinian plague.”) We cannot get behind this representational lens, so we will always have to go *through it*. Although Ankersmit does not want to sever ‘all ties between representation and the world’, he does think that we have to approach these ties through our language, and that our historical language is necessarily representational in the holistic way I have summarised.<sup>349</sup>

This view cuts in two directions. Firstly, it offers an alternative to any model of past-tense reference which treats the individual utterance as the relevant unit for analysis. For example, Michael Dummett’s idea of maintaining a subjunctive ‘truth-value link’ between utterances in the present with truth-makers in the past suggests we hold that  $p$  uttered now about the past at  $t^1$  is true if it *would* have been correct to utter  $p$  at  $t^l$ .<sup>350</sup> The subjunctive can be relied on in so far as we have access to reliable inferential procedures which free us from the need to take a direct view of the past. John McDowell has argued that grasping such a truth-value link requires adopting a transcendental perspective which is unavailable, and that consequently Dummett’s idea is not coherent.<sup>351</sup> McDowell suggests instead that utterances about the past are subject to criteria of warranted assertability which hold in the present – and are thus available to us. Ankersmit rejects the basic assumption of *both* of these views, at least as models of

---

<sup>349</sup> Ankersmit 2012: 80

<sup>350</sup> Dummett 1972; for Dummett’s modified later view, see Dummett 2004.

<sup>351</sup> McDowell 1998: 295-313

references to the past in historiography. He thinks focussing on *individual* statements obscures how they function representationally together.

Yet, Ankersmit's theory cuts in another direction – as a theory of historiography. Instead of comparing Ankersmit with Dummet and McDowell any further, here I want to focus on the *historiographical* value of his appeal to Leibniz' Monadology. What is gained by treating historical representations in the Leibnizian way he suggests? If we can understand this, then we might understand better why Ankersmit sees so little value in theories like Dummet's and McDowell's for historiographical purposes. However, given that I want to give an answer in terms of actions and possibilities, there is a *prima facie* case for saying that I might as well stop before I start in view of Leibniz' seeming to express something like determinism in the Monadology: Complete Individual Concepts are, after all, complete.

### *iii. The Monadology in the philosophy of history*

An attempt to say that Ankersmit's *monad-like historical representations* should be considered as representations of historically specific fields of possible action, as with Gawain's moral character, might look like a non-starter. The whole point of the Monadology, perhaps, is to say that God has created the universe by pre-programming all its basic substances with a Complete Individual Concept of predicates reflecting everything they will do and everything that will happen to them. This is what lies behind his famous view that the universe is harmonious because it is predetermined by God. Whatever independent sense I am able to make of the idea of historically specific actions and possibilities, then, would seem at the most to be an alternative to Ankersmit's conception of historical representations – and one which involves abandoning Leibniz.

Yet, for two reasons, I do not think this problem is substantial. The first (a) is that Ankersmit seems to presume that in the *Monadology* Leibniz offered a coherent theory, representing something like his official view, with a clear purpose. If he did not, then the *Monadology* would not provide a clear grounding for a historiographical theory, which Ankersmit thinks it does. But specialist Leibniz scholarship since about 1985 has seriously called such a judgement into question.<sup>352</sup> The other reason (b) is that even if the *Monadology* is exactly as Ankersmit takes it to be, a gap is still opened-up by his translating it into the philosophy of history. For example, Leibniz' *Monadology* is a theory of everything, but Ankersmit employs it in just a single narrow domain: historiography. Plausible criteria from that domain ought then to carry significant weight. We can pick and choose our Leibniz. So, there is a difficult trail in the history of philosophy parallel to my argument here (a), not to mention a multiplication of its difficulties in relation to independently plausible criteria in the philosophy of history (b). However, some brief points about (a) and (b) should open the way for my later suggestion in terms of possibilities.

With (a), I only need to show briefly that there are open routes in Leibniz scholarship for reaching my destination; I do not need to travel their full length here. It happens that part of my divergence from Ankersmit's use of Leibniz corresponds to Daniel Garber's revised interpretation of the place of the *Monadology* in the Leibnizian corpus.<sup>353</sup> Some interpreters have looked backwards from this work of 1714, just two years before Leibniz' death, suggesting that much of it can be found in writings going

---

<sup>352</sup> See Garber 1985.

<sup>353</sup> Garber 2009

back to the 1670s.<sup>354</sup> So, the Monadology looks like a polished and official final account. Yet Garber resists this in attempting to show that for Leibniz the Monadology was a somewhat novel and perhaps unsuccessful attempt to solve problems which he had been working on for most of his life. Naturally this career seems to have included both new solutions as well as new definitions and orderings of the central problems which occupied Leibniz concerning substances, bodies, souls, and God. The upshot of Garber's reading is then an answer to the question: what is the Monadology a theory *of*? This is effectively the same question I want to ask of Ankersmit's theory of historical representation.

Towards the end of his life, Leibniz wrote a letter describing his later work – including the Monadology – as a turn away from ‘the material to the formal’.<sup>355</sup> The point for Garber, however, is that the formal theory is supposed to explain material phenomena (such as causation), especially how they can be understood in a world of souls and God, not to unmask them as shams. In the same letter Leibniz says that ‘material things are only phenomena, though *well founded and well connected*’.<sup>356</sup> The formal theory is important because it is a theory of such phenomena. The Garber-Leibniz vacillates between formal and material (or corporeal) theories in the course of his philosophical career, and it is within the range of this vacillation we find various interpretations of Leibniz' concept of *monads*. As Ankersmit relies solely on a reading guided by the Monadology, in principle his own theory can be transplanted around into different interpretations of its significance in relation to the rest of the Leibnizian corpus. What is more, the variation between these interpretations substantially alters how we are to

---

<sup>354</sup> Even on this reading, Leibniz seems to be more tolerant of possibilities than a totally deterministic or necessitarian interpretation would suggest; see ‘The Source of Contingent Truths’ [1685-89?] in Leibniz 1989: 98-101.

<sup>355</sup> Leibniz to Remond, quoted by Garber 2009: 303

<sup>356</sup> Leibniz to Remond, quoted by Garber 2009: 303



understand the Monadology. Vincenzo de Risi, for instance, interprets Leibniz' formal monadology as a transcendental philosophy, somewhat like Kant's; consequently, he sees it as a theory of posits making the more familiar, phenomenal world possible.<sup>357</sup> Clearly, if this world includes various possibilities for action, then on de Risi's reading the Monadology provides a transcendental theory of possibilities for action.

There are also serious readings suggesting that the Monadology is consistent with ordinary claims about possibilities relating to action and personal identity (i.e. that a given individual could act in a range of possible ways).<sup>358</sup> On this sort of reading and de Risi's there is an integral link between the formal and the material aspects of Leibniz' thinking. All this shows, of course, is that my suggestion that historical representations represent historically specific fields of possible actions (and that this can be seen as an extension of Ankersmit's theory) is not a complete non-starter. However, my view – and now we shift to (b) – is that something close to Garber's and de Risi's interpretations *must* be available if Leibnizian metaphysics is to provide a plausible grounding for a philosophy of history in the way Ankersmit suggests. My argument for this comes from intuitively plausible criteria in the philosophy of history, not from Leibniz scholarship.

#### *iv. Three criteria for a philosophy of historiography*

Once we have grasped the idea of a 'Complete Individual Concept' as *Ankersmit* uses it, we can – to a great extent – leave Leibniz behind and try to regain our bearings in the

---

<sup>357</sup> De Risi 2000; cf. Nita 2012: 217-220.

<sup>358</sup> Cover & Hawthorne 2000: 89; also see the interpretations in Wilson 2001 and Brown & Chiek 2016. David Lewis, of course, thought his modal realism owed something to Leibniz, but feared saying exactly how: Lewis 1986: unpaginated preface.

philosophy of history. I think Ankersmit needs all three of (i) a rigorous ‘formal’ account of representation, (ii) a *principled* argument for connecting this account to real historiography, and (iii) at least one *demonstration* of the light the account casts on particular examples. So far, his monadological theory of representation has provided a fascinating candidate for (i), but in the rest of this paper I want to show that there is a way to achieve (ii) and (iii). Even if Ankersmit rejects these criteria as *requirements*, surely the potential availability of (ii) and (iii) is to be welcomed.

Perhaps Ankersmit would reject these criteria if he thinks that a *logic* of historiography is worth pursuing independently – as his early work suggested:

[N]arrative logic itself should not be confused with the problems its application gives rise to. For the logical characteristics of the narratio [= historical representation] being studied here are to be found in *every* intelligible sample of narrative historiography, and precisely for that reason these characteristics cannot show us how to distinguish between good and bad historiography (i.e. the best application of the narrativist rules).<sup>359</sup>

Intuitively, I struggle to see how there can be any reason not to be interested in the ways such a logic might be put to use. But there is a more substantial flaw in Ankersmit’s early reasoning here. I accept, of course, that logical or epistemological considerations are unlikely by themselves to yield a normative theory of historiography. Yet, a normative theory is not the only sort of application we might hope for from a theory of historiography. The generality of the logical properties (‘characteristics’) of historiography may be the key to a *dimension* which, once identified, changes our reading of particular works of history and their details. Einsteinian relativistic physics

---

<sup>359</sup> Ankersmit 1983: 145; see also Ankersmit 2014: 104–8.

(for just one example) was surely *general*, but it made possible new analyses of particular phenomena. And Leibniz and the Cartesians gave very different analyses of physical phenomena in virtue of disagreeing about very *general* features of the universe.

Such fundamental differences of perspective are not ineffable, and below I will try to show that Ankersmit's theory can be extended to reveal something very general about how *possibilities for action* constitute a dimension of historiography. I hope to show that the recognition of this dimension enables new analyses. Indeed, Ankersmit himself has occasionally hinted at an 'application' for what earlier he thought of as a pure logic:

Everything will give us *access* to everything else, in the way that even the humblest of the Leibnizian monads is a mirror of the whole universe. Obviously, this truth is dramatically demonstrated by suggesting how the most insignificant of events can give us access to the structure of the novel's [or historical-representation's] universe. [...] The synthesis is here part of the detail and not the detail part of the synthesis – or, as Auerbach writes [...]: "There is confidence that in any random event plucked from the course of a life at any time, the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed".<sup>360</sup>

Apart from the fact that Ankersmit is now applying the same Leibnizian theory to *literary* realism, the trouble with this statement is simply that it is so obscure, bordering on Rosicrucian. What we really want to know, surely, is where Auerbach (whom Ankersmit quotes) gets his 'confidence' from, and *how* we are to *navigate* – and through what medium – between the details of a text's 'universe', *how* monads 'mirror' it, and *how* they give us 'access' it. With Ankersmit's theory alone, and without a

---

<sup>360</sup> Ankersmit 2001: 216, my emphasis; Geertz makes a similar, and similarly unexplained, claim about studying a culture: '[o]ne can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else [...] [o]ne has only to learn how to gain *access* to them.' Geertz 1993 [1973]: 453, my emphasis.

principled argument connecting historical representations to their contents (ii), we would be at a complete loss were someone to take us at our word, pick ‘any random event’, and ask us to *portray* ‘the totality’ in it. This is a mythological challenge reminiscent of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. However, in what follows I offer a way to make sense of a less ambitious claim: we can – and *will* – show how a single action in *Montaillou* links into the rest of the text as a representational whole.

v. *A principled connection between historical representations and historical content*

I have treated the core of Ankersmit’s borrowing from Leibniz’ Monadology as lying in the idea of a Complete Individual Concept. For Ankersmit, such a Concept gives us a way to explain how all the statements in a work of history come together to form an individual *historical representation* which carries-out a three-place operation of representation (see above). I want to know what the value of this idea is for studying historiography, so I want to know what it tells us about the contents of works of history. What I am going to suggest is that each of the statements in an Ankersmitian Complete Individual Concept can function as a coordinate of the content of a historian’s overall representation. However, I want to treat this content in terms of historically specific possibilities for action as in *Sir Gawain*. So, while narratively statements just have the explicit content they appear to have, constitutively (or representationally) they function to introduce *conditions* of ranges of possibilities which characterise a particular historical context or situation.<sup>361</sup> This distinction is partly between a statement’s integral content and the achievement of this content within the representation. In this respect it is similar to Quentin Skinner’s distinction between the illocutionary and perlocutionary forces of an utterance. More particularly here, however, the distinction

---

<sup>361</sup> See Skinner 2002.

is between two dimensions of statements as they appear in historical representations. Distinguishing a dimension of *possibilities* can give us the resources for (ii) a principled argument connecting Ankersmit's idea of historical representation to the details of works of history. The argument is as follows:

The content of a statement has two aspects. One aspect of the statement corresponds to its narrative content, the other to its constitutive content – but these are very hard to separate. What I have called the *narrative* content of any given statement is just its explicit content. So, if a historical representation includes the statement 'Charles Martel marched to Tours', then the narrative content is as it seems. Narratively, statements just say what they seem to say about what actually happened, as in the progression of Gawain's quest. However, this appears to exhaust any potential *constitutive* content of the statement as a contribution to the historical representation, just as Gawain's particular actions are impossible to separate from his pentangular moral character. As things stand, Ankersmit has simply *stipulated* a formal predicative relation to make sense of his interesting but general theory of representation. Aside from sustaining Ankersmit's attachment to a general representationalist theory of historiography, what is the benefit of emphasising the constitutive function?

Ankersmit's theory encourages us to look for a relation between this statement and the other statements when they are placed side by side. In his view, when all the statements of a work of history are placed like this together, a historical representation is constituted. Now this alters the puzzle: either (i) there is a separate and invisible thing which *is* the historical representation, somewhat like the *Ding an sich* in Kant, or (ii) the statements must affect one another in a comprehensible way without changing each others' explicit narrative content (as I have called it). Everything Ankersmit says about Leibniz suggests he wants to reject the first possibility: *predicating* a statement of the

historical representation as a whole requires we avoid splitting the statement from the whole. So, how can the statements affect each other, without affecting their explicit, narrative content? If they cannot, what is the point of putting them together in a historical representation? Let me state my solution to this puzzle in principle, and then (in §6) explain how it applies to historiography.

In principle, if the explicit content of a statement like ‘Charles Martel marched to Tours’ is treated as a condition of some possibilities, then which possibilities these are will depend on what other statements ‘Charles Martel marched to Tours’ appears alongside. Apart from the reference to possibilities, this is a very basic point about contextual significance. If the first statement is preceded by ‘The Umayyad army proceeded steadily northwards’, then even with just these two statements we are encouraged to imagine a historically specific situation. This would be a rather short and boring historical representation, but it captures what I think is important about Ankersmit’s idea. Charles Martel’s marching becomes a condition grounding certain aspects of a situation; but its character *as a condition* is affected by the content of the other statement. With the Umayyad army marching towards him, Charles Martel’s own march changes the *situation* in a particular way, even though there are various possibilities for what might happen next. The historical situation or context, I want to say, consists in this range of possibilities grounded by specific historical conditions.<sup>362</sup> The really important thing about this for my principled argument is that it gives us an account of how statements in a historical representation can affect each other, and thereby combine into a monadic whole, without changing each other’s explicit content. Charles Martel’s marching only affects the range of possibilities attaching to the

---

<sup>362</sup> This of course is similar to the point in Hawthorn 1991.

Umayyad march northwards, not the basic fact of the matter, and thus only affects its character *as* a historical condition.<sup>363</sup>

This dual functioning of statements in historical representations can be modelled with a degree of philosophical precision in terms of conditional possibilities. Conditional possibility is a sub-species of what Nicholas Rescher has called ‘reality-linked’ possibility and what Barbara Vetter has called ‘localized’ modality. Its basic logic is essentially the same as conditional probability.<sup>364</sup> A conditional probability is the probability of *y* given *x*; a conditional possibility is the possibility of *y* given *x*. Clearly there is a fairly mundane but systematic connection between the two, given that all (conditional) non-0 probabilities can be coded as *I*s in a ‘possibilistic’ system, as Jon Elster has put it.<sup>365</sup> This can be conceptualised further as a relationship between two positions, *pace* Elster and others since. If we assume that position A is occupied as a starting-position, then A is the condition. Imagine another position, B; this (B) may or may not be possible, given A as a starting-point, so it is a candidate possibility (*y*). If we can get to B from A in one move, Elster calls B ‘adjacently’ possible relative to A. If we can get from B to A in any number of moves, then Elster calls B ‘reachably’ possible relative to A.<sup>366</sup> Such a basic map-like conception of possibilities also underpins some more recent attempts to model historical contingency in terms of a space of possibilities.<sup>367</sup> However, this focus on singular conditional relationships

---

<sup>363</sup> There is no requirement, of course, that Martel and the Umayyad’s should be aware of each other’s marching because the fact that they are, as in the content of the relevant statements, is enough to make the historical situation change.

<sup>364</sup> See: Rescher 2003; Vetter 2015; see also Ramsey 1990 [1929] [1929]: 95-6

<sup>365</sup> Cf. Elster 1978, 28-30

<sup>366</sup> Elster 1978: 28-32

<sup>367</sup> Inkpen & Turner 2013; Boyd & Richerson 2005; Ben-Menahem 1997 and 2011 – the latter in Tucker 2011; also see McGhee 2007 for the idea of a space of possibilities in evolutionary theory.

between conditions (x) and possibilities (y) is elementary from a historiographical point of view.

More important for my proposed extension of Ankersmit's theory is that historical conditions have their character in virtue of a relationship with *multiple* possibilities – this is what makes them features of a *situation*. This is why I say that a condition corresponds to a *range* of historically specific possibilities. What is more, even very simple representations of historical situations, such as one involving just Charles Martel and the Umayyad armies marching towards each other, involve more than one condition (x). As I showed above for that simple representation, historical conditions affect each other *as* conditions, but without affecting each other's core content. Mapped onto Ankersmit's Leibnizian theory, each predicate in the Complete Individual Concept can be treated as introducing a condition. So the place of *x* is filled by the complete set of predicates  $p^1 \dots p^x$ . Brought together, these conditions mutually generate an overall range of conditional possibilities via which all the conditions are related – this is what I meant by saying (above) that possibilities constitute a *dimension* of historiography. So, on my account, we can make sense of *monad*-like historical representations in a similar way to the moral representation of Gawain. The difference is simply that the range of possible actions characteristic of a historical situation is likely to be much more complex than a single man's quest to find the Green Knight.

If Ankersmit wishes to maintain a robust connection with Leibniz's broader philosophy, rather than just borrowing the formal apparatus of the Complete Individual Concept, then – as I suggested above – there are various interpretations available according to which he could treat this possibilistic dimension as merely phenomenal. Even so, there would be a strong case (with the parallel in Leibniz scholarship I have mentioned) for insisting that what would be cast as 'merely phenomenal' is in fact rather important. It



would include everything that historians write about: what people have done and in what situations. If Ankersmit is willing to break from Leibniz in all but the Complete Individual Concept, then what I have said about possibilities simply provides an independent theory of *content* for historical representations which is compatible with his theory. Regardless, the main thing I have offered in this section is a principled argument for connecting historical representations to their contents in terms of their Complete Individual Concepts. What still remains to be seen, however, is the historiographical benefits of making this move – which above I said needs to be demonstrated (iii). I have two final points to make in this regard.

*vi. Demonstrating the representation-statement linkage*

Above I suggested Ankersmit's Auerbach-derived statement about *portraying* a whole representation in just one of its statements is obscure. What I will now argue is that the account in terms of possibilities which I gave as a formal extension of Ankersmit's theory can make explicit sense of the relationship between statements and historical representations. Armed with a principled argument about the relationship (ii), now we can attempt a demonstration (iii). Despite its obscurity, the Rosicrucian puzzle set by Ankersmit's statement about portrayal is at least *testable*. Yet, I suggested above that it is very hard to know where to start. How can one possibly portray an entire work of history just through one of its statements?

Apart from any difficulty understanding what one is being asked to do, there seems to be a positive barrier in the way of doing *anything* with a single statement from a work of history on Ankersmit's account. As with Gawain's actions and his moral character, Ankersmit's theory of representation based on the Complete Individual Concept makes it impossible to distinguish between the representation and its statements. An individual

statement, then, just says what it says – and its relationship with the representation just seems like a posit designed to make sense of Ankersmit's general theory. However, in the last section I suggested a way to achieve something like a historiographical version of nuclear fusion, and this gives us some power faced with the puzzle of portrayal. I suggested that an individual statement is connected to a whole historical representation *via* the possibilities which make its content a *condition* in a historical situation. So, maybe all Ankersmit's and Auerbach's idea of 'portrayal' amounts to is that elucidating the relationship between an individual statement *as a condition* and all the other statements involves elucidating the range of possibilities they have been brought together to determine. In short, to 'portray' the whole in one of its 'random events' is to answer this question: how does the content of a statement contribute to the historical situation represented in a work of history?

The idealised historical representation I introduced above involving just two statements (about the marching of Charles Martel and the Umayyad army) shows what I mean by elucidation. Take the statement about Charles Martel's marching ( $x^1$ ). This does not tell us very much, but it tells us something – enough, at least, to make the historian want to know more. If we are then told that the Umayyad army is marching steadily northward ( $x^2$ ), we learn something more about how *Charles Martel's* marching is disposed in a particular situation made up of a specific range of possibilities ( $y$ s): they might fight, they might talk, they might *both* get lost in the mists of the Loire valley, they might retreat or pray. It is not possible that they should bomb or sue each other, or take a helicopter tour of the vineyards.<sup>368</sup> Grasping the situation involves an intuitive but increasingly detailed sense of such possibilities. To get this, as historians, we will need to know as much as possible about the conditions of the situation – about Martel's

---

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Rackham 1995: 31 (footnote).

armour, about the forms of transport which are available, about the landscape, the size of his army, and his sense of identity. On my account, adding these details in further statements alters our sense of the possibilities characteristic of the situation in which Charles Martel is marching.

Charles Martel's and the Umayyad's marching, along with any other features of the situation we can add, mutually condition each other *as* conditions of the situation. What *might* happen in this situation is a range of possibilities. The fact that this situation is emerging in 732 CE gives us a further sense of the conditions which constitute it. As long as we come in with some background knowledge, we will not expect Martel to be thinking about battlefields in terms of the range of a steel crossbow (not invented until the year 1370). However many statements we add, if we start describing Charles Martel's marching *as a condition* of a situation, we will have to refer to the contents of the other statements. So, in describing a single 'random event' (as Auerbach puts it) we will or, rather, we *may*<sup>369</sup> portray the whole historical representation.

### *vii. The philosophy of Montaillou*

To demonstrate that the same possibilistic conception of historical representation applies to a real work of history (criterion *iii* from above), let us consider *Montaillou*. First, we need something like a 'random event'. We will take an action of Pierre Maury, a head shepherd who insists on his hard, high-mountain life despite other options. LeRoy Ladurie thinks that Maury reveals a 'pastoral philosophy' or 'mentalité' showing us something about life in Montaillou in the late 1200s and early 1300s, despite the years which have passed:

---

<sup>369</sup> Only 'may' because on any given occasion we might stop short of a full elucidation, depending on our interests.

The traces of psychology and mentalité which we can, however, glean something of and attribute to [the inhabitants of Montaillou] are necessarily fragmentary. The important thing, in these conditions, will be the power to represent in what way these men viewed the meaning of their life; and what consciousness they have of their identity. The response to this question of a pastoral philosophy, or even just a philosophy of Montaillou, is clear enough. It will be given to us, many times over, by Maury himself.<sup>370</sup>

Maury's philosophy of life, which LeRoy Ladurie treats as exemplary of a certain philosophy of Montaillou, a pastoral philosophy, is grounded in a notion of *destiny*. For LeRoy Ladurie, this sense of *fatum* was not a mere proclivity for superstition; he shows us that Maury rejected magical practices such as reading auguries in the flight of birds as the follies of old women.<sup>371</sup> We learn about his philosophy of destiny through records of conversations where others challenged his mode of living. This he defended not with practical arguments but in fundamental, existential terms. On each occasion, threatened with the predations of the inquisition or tempted by promises of an easier, settled life, Maury insists that he must *carry his own destiny* ['il faut que je porte mon destin'], neither the first nor the last heretic to insist that he could do no other.<sup>372</sup> LeRoy Ladurie is trying to show us something about montalionalais life; but all we get at this point is a dusty shepherd's rather gruff, enigmatic avowal to carry on regardless.

This action (the avowal), introduced into *Montaillou* by one of its statements, is so enigmatic it tells us very little by itself. Thus, it represents a very difficult example of a 'random event' in which the rest of *Montaillou* can be 'portrayed', according to

---

<sup>370</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190

<sup>371</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 192.

<sup>372</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190. One thinks forward to Luther of course ; cf. op. cit.: 449.

Ankersmit and Auerbach. With it we reach the limits of both a man's comprehension of his own life and the limits of the explicit content of the text – and at it we may all be dumbfounded. LeRoy Ladurie does not ask whether Maury's interlocutors accept, or even understand, the quasi-explanation Maury offers for rejecting their suggestions about settling down to an easier life, so there is no attempt to generalize with any precision to a *mentalité* which has an autonomous role as an explanans. Thus LeRoy Ladurie does not seem to be revealing, through Maury, presuppositions held in common by the residents of Montaignou in Collingwood's sense.<sup>373</sup> What is 'absolute' here is action – the tenacity of a particular mode of life.

This parallels the pentangular representation of Gawain which is dependent on his actions for its content. Maury's avowal itself only adds minutely to our sense of the broader *mentalité*. It (the avowal) is a single, open coordinate, somewhat like a single action of Gawain's. To get any grasp on it at all means triangulating it further by locating it among the content of the other statements in *Montaignou* – to grasp the situation in which it appears. The statement seems wholly useless and mysterious on its own because it lacks clear content. The reader of *Montaignou* is thus pushed towards a grander reading of Maury's philosophy in so far as it, and Maury himself, is only a feature in Ladurie's cartography of Montaignou in the latter years of inquisition. Elsewhere in the book this cartography comprises descriptions of the *terroir* and the houses, lineages, and routes of transhumance which gave it a broad shape; and then there are the other individuals of *Montaignou*, about whom we learn their sexual preferences, the frequency of their bathing, whether they slept clothed or not, how they swore, insulted each other, prayed, or died; and again: their relationships with outsiders, the status of women and children, the power of local elites, the importance of taverns

---

<sup>373</sup> Collingwood 1940

and the mass, and the distribution of wealth. We even look beyond the Pyrenes to the Kingdom of France, which Ladurie represents as a sword of Damocles hanging over Montaillou.

The extension of Ankersmit's theory of historical representation I have offered suggests that in *Montaillou* all of these things have been gathered together to represent the same – ominous, restricted, relatively ungoverned but not unlimited – situation. We might lack an image as clear-cut as the pentangle, but we have the actions and other conditions comprising the situation in Montaillou. LeRoy Ladurie mentions a 'mentalité', but this is vaguer than the pentangle and relies even more heavily on particular descriptions of action. As with the idealised historical representation with Charles Martel and the Umayyads, the effect of bringing such diverse factors together *as conditions* is to represent an overall, unified range of possibilities for action which is characteristic of a time and place – of a situation. However, unlike the moral representation of Gawain, here we are not concerned with the possible actions of one man, but the more general range of possibilities which emerge for the people LeRoy Ladurie discusses in the historically specific conditions he writes about. Maury's avowing his destiny fits into this world historically. The particularly oblique statement adding Maury's avowal to *Montaillou*, where Maury is almost refusing to explain, relies on all the other statements for its content to be interpretable at all. To grasp Maury's avowal *historically* is to see it in connection with the contents of these other statements. This is only different to elucidating one of the statements in the idealised representation of Charles Martel's marching because it is more complex.

*viii. Event-condition duality of actions in historiography?*

If the in-principle solution I have proposed to Ankersmit's Rosicrucian puzzle about historical representations works, as I have at least begun to demonstrate for *Montaillou*, there is nonetheless something we have not accounted for. With Gawain, we said that his actions and the moral representation we have of his character are impossible to separate. In making sense of a similar general feature of *historical* representations, I suggested thinking of a narrative function and a constitutive function of historical representations, and we can think of these as two dimensions. The narrative dimension is linear (like reading) and progresses through the actual contents of statements in a historical representation. The constitutive dimension is what holds all of these contents together in a whole. The challenge here has been to find substantive work for the constitutive dimension of historical representations in terms of the Complete Individual Concept, beyond Ankersmit's needing to posit it to enable his general theory of representation.

The trouble, though, seemed to be that the narrative contents of statements exhaust their contribution to the historical representation. I have therefore proposed a way to allow them to *both* work together *and* affect each other's contribution along the constitutive dimension of the historical representation. On my extension of Ankersmit's account, this can happen without each affecting the other's explicit narrative contents. The content of any given statement – an action, say – is thus intersected by two dimensions. Along the narrative dimension, statements just say what they say: a statement with an action for its content, like Maury's avowal or Martel's marching, just gives us the *event* of the action. Along the other, constitutive dimension, as I have proposed analysing it, the action functions as a *condition* of a historically specific situation. I have treated the contribution of such a condition in terms of its affecting the range of possibilities which

characterise the historical situation. So, one consequence of my extension of Ankersmit's theory is what we might call the *event-condition duality* of actions in historiography.

Elazar Weinryb has pointed-out a duality of function in historical events: events can function both as *enabling conditions* and as *causes*, depending on how they are emphasised by historians.<sup>374</sup> If belligerence on the part of a local lord is said to *cause* a short war on the border between Wales and Mercia, a historian might portray existing but more diffuse animosities between the Welsh and the Mercians as one of the *enabling conditions*. These are what enable the belligerence of the lord to lead to war, and not just a short quarrel between the lord and the nearest Welshman. The distinction is somewhat arbitrary because it is just as possible to say that the belligerence of *the lord* enabled existing *animosities* to cause a war.

Yet, whichever way such a situation is divided, Weinryb's distinction presumes that the main thing in history is singular actual events – including actions – standing in singular causal relationships with other actual events. I have treated this as the narrative dimension of historiography. But it tells us nothing about historians' engagements with historically specific *situations* in which characteristic ranges of action are possible. The idea of a constitutive historical representation can be used to specify this possibilistic dimension, and the involvement of the Complete Individual Concept reflects the degree of precision with which historians grapple with it: everytime they write something, they shape – perhaps in a small way – how we see the *situation* they are writing about. They alter the range of possible actions we take to be characteristic of this situation, the boundaries of which they define. This is the closest I can get to making

---

<sup>374</sup> Weinryb 2011: 113 in Tucker 2011.



historiographical sense of Ankersmit's philosophical idea that works of history like *Montaillou* have single, Leibnizian souls.

## 20. Event-Condition Duality in Medieval Actions

Before exploring the idea of event-condition duality further theoretically (in chapters 21 and 22), I want us to get a more intuitive grasp on what exactly it is we are discussing by commenting on some examples of actions drawn from medieval history. But why *medieval* examples? One heuristic benefit is that they are relatively contemporaneous to the subject matter of *Montaillou* – our ultimate destination. In a moment we will mention feudal Occitania, which was the broader context of *Montaillou*. However, there are further benefits of using examples of medieval actions for which, often, we have very little evidence. The relative paucity of available written evidence has encouraged in medievalists an intensity with particular actions and episodes represented in sources such as charters, inquisitorial records, and lives. As much as the idea of The Dark Ages is more histrionic than historical, the evidence flickers for European history after the fall of Rome and before the roughly 'modern' rise of the state, which made written-records abundant – if not consistently of higher quality.<sup>375</sup> Medieval actions are thus often encountered as being rather isolated, a little like the imagined cases which drive action-theory.<sup>376</sup> This calls into intense question what and how (and perhaps *whether*) we know about them.

*Example 1: Early Medieval Lucca:* Consider Chris Wickham's commentary on the Lucchesia based on early medieval charters:

---

<sup>375</sup> Wickham 2005 catalogues what light we have for the 'dark ages'; also see Rackham 1995: 17 for a curt summary of the situation in England.

<sup>376</sup> We will consider some below.

Natalis, a master builder from northern Italy, (*homo transpadanus magister casarius*), founded a church in Lucca in 805; at his death and those of his priests, the church and its properties, including a house in Vicopelago just south of the city, would go to the bishop. When that happened, the bishop also got a charter in which Nozo son of Raduald of Vicopelago sold the house there to Natalis and his brother in 787, which he had earlier bought from Gausprand son of Peredeus.<sup>377</sup>

Charters, then, like other characteristically medieval forms of evidence, such as inquisitorial registers (e.g. Jacques Fournier's) and hagiography, record relatively isolated peaks of action. This often involves consciously managed relations between people, such as voluntary transfers of property. Reflecting on action as shown in such evidence might help reveal how explanations work in relation to historical knowledge as we actually have it, rather than in an idealised form. Even a general theory of history or historiography ought to be sufficiently articulate to *demonstrate* what light it sheds on historical details with theoretical precision. Charters remain an important category of evidence for the High Middle Ages, an extensive and rather roughly drawn period from approximately the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Example 2: High Medieval Poland:* In 1166, for example, Duke Henry of Sandomierz gave a charter to the monastery of Zagosc in which he said: 'I give the tavern in Czechów in order to restore the oxen in the said villages; no one may presume to inflict any injury on, or demand any service from, the taverner whom the monks should establish at Czechów,'<sup>378</sup> As a legal action, the Duke of Sandomierz' issuing this charter provides for us a stereotyped, self-conscious, and somewhat over-described

---

<sup>377</sup> Wickham 2005: 389

<sup>378</sup> Quoted by Arnold 2008: 41. I have edited the quotation slightly.

example of a token action which we can only approach in historical terms. However, this is unlike standard examples in action-theory, which tend to be physical movements imbued with meaning, perhaps via reference to the agent's intentional states.<sup>379</sup> Here the action comes ready-packaged in a detailed linguistic form designed to express the Duke's intentions and contribute, by their expression, to the fulfilment of his wishes. Whatever else it shows us, the surviving charter in the hands of medievalists is evidence for an *action*: the making of a charter with the specific intentions with which it is inscribed regarding how others should act in its light.

One way to make what I have said about historical actions clearer is to focus on cases like the charter given to the Czechów monastery by the Duke of Sandomierz. The inscribed intention is clear enough – let us accept. But further light is shed on the action involved, the making of that charter, by historical research into the context of its making. This need not reveal further, previously hidden meanings or contents of the intention, but rather place limits on its reach. To see this, one might begin by reflecting in general terms on what it is to explain historically the action involved in making a charter.

*Example 3: High Medieval Occitania:* Discussions of feudalism often have at their heart the specific character of relations of dependency in the holding of property. For instance, a *free fief* in medieval Occitania (the broader base of Montailou, in fact) was perhaps different to an *allod* in so far as only the former obliged the holder to give up their castle at the demand of their lord.<sup>380</sup> An unfree *fief* would make the holder more fully a vassal, perhaps by obligating a provision of fighting men from within its

---

<sup>379</sup> See Sandis 2009 and Ruben 2003 – I discuss the latter below.

<sup>380</sup> Paterson 1993: 19-28

territory. Inscribed in charters, these categories help to specify intentions regarding desired sets of possibilities: ranges of permissions and obligations.

To explain or understand the action of making such a charter *historically*, in my terms, is to reveal the *actual* (or ‘real’ in Hegel’s term<sup>381</sup>) – and not merely intended or desired – sets of possibilities for what could proceed from its making.<sup>382</sup> The historian wants to get at the situation the action was done in as a dimension of the action itself. The action of making the charter is thus considered as a condition among other conditions affecting the situation. Although relations of dependency as expressed in grades of property-holding are often presented as systems, not least the entire so-called ‘feudal system’, the real historical work is to be found in sensitivity to local conditions at variance to the stereotype.<sup>383</sup> This does not mean, though, that a sense of the broader situation is simply abandoned by the historian. To see this, and to see how I propose to account for it, we must look at a particular case more closely.

*Back to Poland:* The Duke’s charter marks his giving the Czechów monks a right to establish and take income from a tavern, this giving *is* the historical legal action in question seems apparent. But John Arnold comments that with a charter giving rights over capital:

[...] matters may be more complex than this initially makes clear. The nature of the donations, and the rights they provided over the land given, could vary, and could indeed be subject to future dispute. It is unlikely, to return to the case of Duke Henry and the Zagosc monks, that the duke intended the monastery to be able to do anything it wanted with the tavern in perpetuity, only that it could have the income to restore its

---

<sup>381</sup> See part I.

<sup>382</sup> See below.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Foot and Robinson, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 1.

flocks. Beyond that indeterminate point, the matter became hazy: the monastery would likely retain the income unless the duke, or another party, made a future claim – but if it attempted to sell the tavern to a third party, it could find the matter subject to dispute by the duke or his heirs. Whether or not one sees ‘dispute’ behind every property transfer, it is certainly the case that land donated to monasteries seems to have sometimes been handed back and forth between the family of the donator and the recipients, the same piece of land somehow being ‘given’ at various points in time. *What* was transferred by charter is not always as obvious as one might first think.<sup>384</sup>

Where things become ‘hazy’, Arnold shifts from discussing the Duke’s intentions to discussing a range of things that *might* happen after the charter has been made. It may be that the Duke had less than ‘perpetuity’ in mind when making the charter. Yet, though it may form part of the picture, this ‘intentionalist’ aspect of the action does not dominate its *historical* explanation when we consider its event-condition duality. Rather, according to my hypothesis, the truly historical explanantia are contained in the second half of the quotation from Arnold. It is the possibilities for what, in the context, could plausibly *proceed* from the charter which do the explaining.

At the ‘hazy’ point where the Duke’s intentions end and the rest of history begins, the following plausible possibilities constitute a historical explanation of his making of the charter: the monastery retains the income; the Duke (or someone else) makes a contradictory claim; the monastery tries to sell the tavern (which the Duke or his heirs would likely dispute); finally, there could be multiple further phases of ‘donation’ of the tavern between the house of Sandiomerz and the Czechów monastery. No doubt these possibilities could be multiplied in a less summary account; but any further enumeration

---

<sup>384</sup> Arnold 2008: 43

will depend on the historians' detailed grasp of the context.<sup>385</sup> What they show is that other elements, apart from the making of the charter, constrain or enable the relevant sets of possibilities. This is what I mean by treating these elements as further conditions. So, understanding or explaining an action *historically* is a special sort of contextualization where intentional states are only one category of condition. Intentions, like any other sort of historical condition (in my sense), are grasped *as* conditions by specifying the *limits* of their power over future possibilities, not simply – and never directly – by specifying their mental contents.<sup>386</sup>

Suppose I am right that the Duke of Sandomierz' charter-making is to be grasped as a condition of historically specific possibilities – the tavern's repeated donation, its retention by the Czechów monks, their (disputed) attempt to sell it, the Duke's family's attempt to claim it back. Each of these possibilities, including whichever turned out to happen, is partially enabled by further conditions involving the presence and particular behaviour of others. These are referred to explicitly when we enumerate the possibilities characteristic of the situation. The same can be said for Natalis' church-building in the 9<sup>th</sup> century: that the Church would take ownership of the building after Natalis' death is one of the possibilities which will feature in a historical explanation of his action. The prominence of such a possibility, of course, may lead one to reflect on the persistent, though not unchanging, centrality of the Church in determining medieval possibilities.

*Example 4: High Medieval Montailloz.* Such possibilities arise from historically specific *social* conditions, at least in the minimal sense that they involve the action of various other people. Yet, in my account *anything* affecting the possibilities for what

---

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Hawthorn 1991: chp.1.

<sup>386</sup> Cf. Rideley 2009: 181-196, esp. 183-6.

might follow an action historically, such as the physical topography of the Pyrenean mountain landscape in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, can contribute to forming the relevant range of possibilities. As Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie writes in *Montaillou*:

The concrete meaning of travel on foot, in its ways of climbing, in this mountainous region, is always prescribed: one does not simply go from one point to another, above all in such a high village [*village pentu*] as Montaillou. One climbs or, better, descends.<sup>387</sup>

While the Pyrenees set a particular range of possibilities for travel on foot (or hoof), particular actions of the so-called Cathars<sup>388</sup> can be explained by fitting them in as contributions to a distinctive and somewhat persistent mountain culture, distanced from the markets of Toulouse and, for a tragic-short while, out of reach to the inquisitions of Pamiers. But neither of these forms of separation consist in single acts or phases of action – ‘matters at hand’, in Hegel’s terms. A shepherd’s hiding himself away from Toulouse and Pamiers keeps a certain range of mountain paths open for carrying trade-goods, transient labour, and the influence of the heretics.<sup>389</sup> To grasp his actions historically, in this way, is in one sense to present them as a contributing cause of a historical effect. But the ‘effect’ is on the range of possibilities constituting a historical situation. It does not consist in a single possibility which became actual and followed the action in time, as in a ‘matter at hand’. Here the ‘effect’ (an altered range of possibilities) explains the ‘cause’ (action): the usual relationship between an action (=

---

<sup>387</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975, 431; cf. Braudel 1995 : 25-52.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Pegg 2001: 191.

<sup>389</sup> LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 190

explanandum) and its explanantia (= explaining elements) is thus reversed.<sup>390</sup> We can see this in one final example.

*Example 5: High Medieval Umbria:* It is conventional to explain the acts of St. Francis of Assisi in 12<sup>th</sup> century Umbria by highlighting the extent to which his urge to holy poverty sprang from a background of prior conditions involving a widespread retreat to religious impoverishment, away from the guilt-ridden wealth of city trade.<sup>391</sup> As with charters and inquisitorial records, studies of medieval saints must interpret fairly isolated actions treated with heavy emphasis in the hagiographical sources (“Lives”). In *Francis of Assisi*, a modern biography which critically examines the hagiography, André Vauchez admits the limits of such an analysis of Francis based on general conditions – if it is *Francis* we are interested in.<sup>392</sup> In fact, the account I have given lets me specify the limits in two ways.

Firstly, to the extent to which anything about Francis is explained, it is only the possibility of his actions: surrounding conditions make them likely, or plausible, or understandable. However, above we saw that Hegel insisted this ‘mere contingency’ alone is idle in historiography. If we presume Francis’ actions – if he did them they must be possible! – then to explain them is to explain the contribution of their actual occurrence to the overall range of historically characteristic possibilities.

---

<sup>390</sup> There are in fact two ways to conceive of the reversal, logically and chronologically. (1) If the relevant possibilities are tensed by their contents (i.e. the possibility of fighting *tomorrow*), then the hypothesis has the explanantia following the explanandum. (2) Yet even if this is rejected in favour of tensing the possibilities *qua* possibilities (i.e. *the possibility now* of fighting tomorrow), we are still making actions (= explananda) into conditions which are *logically* prior to their explanantia. The relevant sort of illumination, whether we think of this as explanation or understanding, comes from the logic of the information about possibilities: thus, I rely on at least (2), leaving it open that conditions and their possibilities are contemporaneous.

<sup>391</sup> Vauchez 2012, 3-32

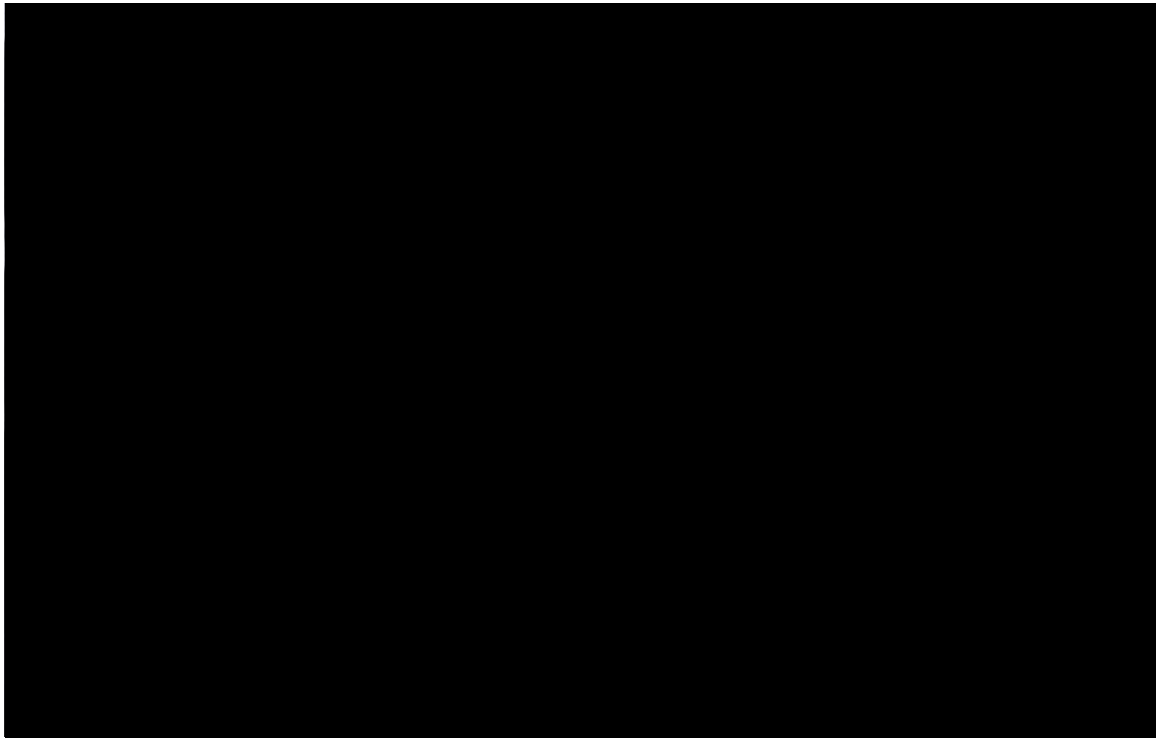
<sup>392</sup> Vauchez 2012: 33



Secondly, it is hard to separate specific actions from historical situations – even when we want to for the purposes of illuminating one action in particular. Unless a particularly unhistorical account is offered, there is likely to be a historical remainder left over even by quite narrow attempts to shed light on individual actions. More may be explained than Francis’ action: in so far as actual 12<sup>th</sup> century conditions are adduced to show the possibility of Francis, it is the actions involved in these conditions themselves (e.g. of the newly intense guilt-expressing *popolo*) which find a partial explanation, *historically*, in what Francis did. Francis reveals, and contributes, just a part of the corresponding range of possibilities which shows us something about how a much more complex situation was disposed. This is what I have called ‘event-condition duality’ in historical actions, and it is a feature of all the examples I have discussed in this section. Conditional upon their having happened, the medieval actions we have considered here seem to open-out into their broader historical situation. This is what lets them be affected in a particular way by their position in a historical representation, as I argued above. We can now turn to consider this feature of historical actions more systematically by analysing a paradigmatic sort of sentence where event-condition duality appears explicitly as part of their syntactical structure.

## 21. Historical Action-Sentences

### *i. Narrative sentences versus historical action-sentences*



*Figure 6*

In High Modern America, Arthur Danto once proposed that what is essentially *historical* about historical knowledge can be grasped in terms of ‘narrative sentences’.<sup>393</sup> Such sentences relate two events or actions, but with the benefit of hindsight:

I mean to isolate and to analyse here a class of sentences which seem to me to occur most typically in historical writings, although they appear in narratives of all sorts and

---

<sup>393</sup> Danto 1985 and 1962

may even enter into common speech in a natural kind of way. I shall designate them as ‘narrative sentences’. Their most general characteristic is that they refer to at least two time-separated events though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer.<sup>394</sup>

Irony, then, is central to Danto’s conception of the essentially narrative core of history – in the same sense of ‘narrative’ I used above. ‘Antonius Block made a fatal move’ is such a sentence, though it is from a history of medieval Sweden in 1348-9, when the plague hit, which Ingmar Bergman never wrote (*figure 6*).

If *The Seventh Seal* (1957) were history not cinema, Danto’s point about such a sentence would be that the history is rather like the film: each frame in it is on a reel with the others. This is close to the claim Ankersmit makes in a more complicated way in relation to Leibniz (see above). Bergman – for we will take a French view of things – knows Block will die and he knows that Block will lose his winner-takes-all game of chess against a personified Death. So, he instils the film with various subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, portends. The film is partly about creeping inevitability, for which the game of chess with Death is the central metaphor.

The Danto-type narrative sentence I have concocted, ‘Antonius Block made a fatal move’, links a particular move in chess – an action – with Block’s later death. Let us take it that this death is an action, of sorts. Clearly Block’s death happens later than the fatal move. What is tantalising and painful about the film is that after a certain point *Block* knows of his impending doom, because his life is mapped on the chessboard. The point of the chessboard is that it is an artificially clear representation, although sometimes this clarity may be available in life given a gloomy prognosis or a

---

<sup>394</sup> Danto 1985: 143. See also Danto 1985: 143-181 and Danto 1959.

particularly tight corner. However, before I offer an extended argument in relation to Ruben's Cambridge theory of action (see chapter 22), I want to discuss an alternative to Danto's narrative sentences which better reflect the centrality of event-condition duality in historical actions.

Danto's sentences might work for the ironies of fiction, as in *The Seventh Seal*. In the film, someone (Ingmar Bergman) knows what will happen, and this combined foreknowledge/retrospection is an essential part of the aesthetic representation *for us*, the viewer. Yet, the examples from history I discussed in chapter 20, and the extension I offered for Ankersmit's representationalism in chapter 19, suggest that more than the narrative, more than the linear placement (and *juxtaposition*) of two actual events, needs to be accounted for. In the chapter of *Analytical Philosophy of History* where Danto discusses narrative sentences, he offers a series of arguments for accounting for contingency. This begins to look close to my concern with possibilities, but for Danto a contingency is still a singular actual event. This means that whatever he says, he will still be discussing the narrative relationships between two events. His paradigm cases all reflect this. My concoction 'Antonius Block made a fatal move' relates Block's making a move in chess with his death, though not all Danto's examples require a single agent to be involved in each action/event. For example, in 'Talleyrand begat Delacroix and Delacroix painted the *Mort de Sardanapale*', Talleyrand's influence appears in the retrospective light of a later Delacroix's painting.<sup>395</sup> I do not intend to dispute Danto's position, for reasons I am about to give; but it might be worth noting that this is exactly the sort of retrospection which Hawthorne says led to anachronism in Vasari's – and many others' – interpretation of Duccio.

---

<sup>395</sup> Danto 1985: 195

To support the account I offered in relation to Ankersmit, I simply need to analyse a different sort of sentence to Danto. What emerges as essentially *historical*, on my account, is the dual functioning of actions as events in a narrative *and* conditions of a constitutive representation of a historical situation. My argument below is an alternative to what Danto says, not a direct competitor. Danto's claim that narrative sentences *typify* historiography does clash with my parallel claim for historical action-sentences – which in turn typify the overall position I argue for in this thesis.<sup>396</sup>

However, Danto does not discuss any historiography at length in *Analytical Philosophy of History* so it is difficult to have an argument with him about this. I rely instead on my broader account. Nevertheless, Danto's account *may* work for sentences of his narrative sort, regardless of whether they typify anything more general. However, I want to clarify the constitutive role of sentences representing action in history.<sup>397</sup> The narrative and the constitutive are dimensions along which historical actions function, simultaneously. The duality is constant and usually implicit in works of history. Yet, there is also an explicit type of sentence to be found in works of history, parallel to Danto's, which I will argue make this duality explicit.

Analysing such *historical action-sentences* will give us a tighter grip on the logical structure of historical representations of action. Happily, this turns out to be relatively straightforward. What I say later in connection with Ruben's theory of action provides a more detailed version which specifies more exactly the role of possibilities. However, analysing historical action-sentences will also let me demonstrate that my account is both catholic and agnostic about causal, intentionalist, and even teleological

---

<sup>396</sup> Cf. Danto 1985: 143.

<sup>397</sup> Danto's claim that narrative sentences *typify* historiography does clash with my parallel claim for historical action-sentences – which in turn typify the overall position I argue for in this thesis: cf. Danto 1985: 143. However, Danto does not discuss any historiography at length in *Analytical Philosophy of History* so it is difficult to have an argument with him about this. I rely instead on my broader account.

explanations in history. These are side issues from the point of view of my treatment of historical actions, and here I explain why.

*ii. Paradigmatic historical action-sentences*

The analytical contents pages of Frank Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943) contains the following sentences as summaries:

- (i) 'The overthrow of Penda meant the end of militant heathenism and the development of civilisation in England'
- (ii) 'Victory of the continental party in 663 meant that scholars in Northumbria would be trained in continental tradition'

Saying, as Stenton does, that such actions 'meant' something indicates their significance in history.<sup>398</sup> I analyse such sentences ('action-sentences') in two parts:

ACTION < SUMMARY OF SUBSEQUENT POSSIBILITIES>

Or explicitly:

- (i') ACTION (the overthrow of Penda) < SUMMARY (end of  
heathenism/development of civilisation)>

---

<sup>398</sup> Stenton 1971 [1943]: xvi

(ii') ACTION (victory of continental party) < SUMMARY (scholars trained in continental tradition)>

My first claim about this is that the summary clauses - the end of heathenism, the development of civilisation, and the projection that scholars would be trained in the continental tradition – do not refer rigidly to any actual actions. Rather, they refer flaccidly to a range of possible actions. To explain the action historically is to specify how it links into this range. But as we said above, the range is surely not as determinate as with dice, for example. So, as Hawthorn showed us in *Plausible Worlds*, possibilities here are the object of the historian's judgement.

### *iii. Implicit historical action-sentences*

Now, even if you accept the analysis I have just offered, you might think it only applies to sentences of the explicit ACTION<SUMMARY> syntax like the ones I just mentioned. But my position involves a bolder claim that this structure is *implicit* whenever actions are mentioned in history. To see how this can be so, compare:

(i) 'The overthrow of Penda meant the end of militant heathenism.'

With Stenton's next entry in his analytical contents page:

(iii) '*Codex Amiatinus* written at Jarrow for presentation to the pope'

Now, this too can be analysed, but explicitly it is just an action. Its explicit structure is

(iii'') ACTION (codex written with INTENTION (present to pope))

So the type with the widest scope is ACTION, and the INTENTION serves only to specify the action. But it is in a work of history, so what is its significance there? I suggest unpacking it in the same way as with the overthrow of Penda:

(i') ACTION (overthrow of Penda) < SUMMARY (end of militant heathenism)>

With (iii), this gives us:

(iii') ACTION (codex written) < SUMMARY>

Or fully:

(iii'') ACTION (codex written INTENTION (give to pope)) < SUMMARY>

But here the SUMMARY is harder to specify. It takes a real historian – and it might take them quite a long time. If we turn to the relevant page in Stenton's main-text, we find various factors:

Earlier Irish scribes had developed what were virtually new hands out of the scripts of the texts which had come to them from the Continent. They produced a characteristic 'half uncial' style of great beauty, which was particularly appropriate to the reproduction of liturgical manuscripts, and developed from it a pointed hand, approximating at times to cursive, suitable for the rapid multiplication of less solemn texts. English scribes of the seventh and eighth centuries could give a brilliant reproduction of the best continental writing of an earlier age. The *Codex Amiatinus*, written at Jarrow before 716 for presentation to the pope, is one of the greatest of all uncial manuscripts. But for all except the most solemn purposes, they normally used



one or other of the Irish modifications of continental script, with the result that it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the products of English and Irish *scriptoria* on palaeographical evidence alone. Each of the two great types of Irish hand was firmly established in England within a generation of the death of Theodore.<sup>399</sup>

We learn that the codex was written in a style derived from Ireland, so it is to be treated as a (small) contribution to an ongoing relationship between Irish monasticism and the warlike English kingdoms. But its writing is also an action facing Rome more directly than the English kingdoms did themselves.<sup>400</sup> This involves a situation comprising a very complicated range of possibilities for what recidivist Romans, warring English, and monkish Irish might do next. There seems little point representing such a list within the semi-formal syntax I have been referring to. It would be better to read the rest of *Anglo-Saxon England*. However, notice that in the full version (iii'') there is reference to an intention – but that it only serves to specify the action.

#### v. *Nesting causality, intentionality, laws and teleology*

If we get this far, just having mentioned the pope I can say why my position involves being catholic – but only with a small ‘c’ for these purposes. In the Preface, I said that this thesis is not about causal explanations. Here is where I offer a short argument to say exactly *why* not, by contrast with Wittgenstein’s merely having insisted on the ‘half-baked’ character of causal talk in history.<sup>401</sup> Not only can I be *catholic*: my picture can accommodate any historical factors which connect with action – as I am about to show. I can also be *agnostic* about causal explanations. All I need to say is that the jury is out

---

<sup>399</sup> Stenton 1971 [1943]: 179

<sup>400</sup> Stenton 1971 [1943]: 180f. There is, of course, much more to say besides.

<sup>401</sup> See Wittgenstein 1980: 62 – quoted in the Preface above.

whether such explanations will be found. The same formal point applies to them as to the INTENTION specifying the action of writing the codex at Jarrow. Causal, lawful, or other explanations can be *nested* in the structure of my account as specifications of conditions. This leaves the overall structure of sentences containing such explanations as a historical action-sentence: ACTION<(SUMMARY)>.

So, for example, let us say that someone, somehow, makes an impressive historical discovery: a telos of history, perhaps given by God. This is not so far off what King Alfred dreamt when he was hiding from the Vikings in a Somerset marsh:

TELOS: there will be an English kingdom by 924.

This can be stated as a historical action-sentence so long as the ACTION is treated as a variable:

ACTION (whatever is done)<SUMMARY(English kingdom by 924)>

We can even turn this into something like a law by putting:

LAW: for all the times after AD 43, everything that happens in them will be drawn towards the creation of an English kingdom in 924 by this SPECIFIED ROUTE < x, y, z, n...>

This is more or less what I discussed in the introduction in terms of Hegel's 'matter at hand' – there with Herakles and Caesar.<sup>402</sup> The specified route rules-out all but one

---

<sup>402</sup> The difference in Hegel's cases of historical necessity is that they involve another layer of variables. This is because the precise route to the 'matter at hand' is not specified. This does not add anything of

possibility in each case, but they are still contingencies. The law the route is nested in contains reference both to a telos (=goal) and a minutely specified route for how it will be reached. It is therefore the strongest sort of deterministic statement one could entertain. Even if such a law is available, I can still treat it in my terms. The question is, what is *historical* about the contribution of such a law? Well, it can be treated as just a special case of my schema for this. There are two versions available:

ACTION (all actions between 43 – 924) < SUMMARY (kingdom in 924)>

This makes clear that one final possibility is inevitable. From what I have said, I am committed to saying that this inevitable possibility provides a historical explanation for all the actions between 43 – 924. Another version is fuller but does basically the same thing:

ACTION (for each action x between 43 – 924) < SUMMARY (all the actions  
between x and the kingdom in  
924)>

This is more exact but does not add anything further of interest. The upshot is that I can be catholic and agnostic because LAW can be nested just like INTENTION. I will show this for the simpler version, A:

A' ACTION (all actions 43 – 924 covered by LAW (each leads lawfully to kingdom in 924)) < SUMMARY (kingdom in 924)>

---

particular interest, but for the sake of argument we would need to put: ACTION(for each action x before the fall of the Republic & for whatever set of intervening events Y between x and the matter at hand z)<SUMMARY(z, the republic falls)>.

vi. *Historical action-sentences: from historiography to action-theory*

Any factor can be accommodated by nesting it in this way, from intentions to laws.

What my analysis *adds* is what makes such nested explanations proper parts of *historical* explanations. There is nothing historical about a glass breaking because it is fragile. But the fragility of the glass might well feature in an account of Eric Bloodaxe's rowdy behaviour at dinner in York – if, for instance, he is supposed to be hosting distinguished guests the following night and risks having nothing to serve their drinks in. His rowdiness could be studied by a psychologist, but this has nothing to do directly with history. Rather, his jumping on the table with his boots on has a specifically historical significance as a contribution to the context he is in:

ACTION (Bloodaxe jumps on table)< SUMMARY (offends guests, looks stupid, looks strong, cements an alliance...)>

This can be recognised as substantively *historical* because it is historically *wrong* (Eric is likely to have had metal chalices). Nonetheless, put its wrongness aside for a moment. As long as the psychologist, covering-law theorist, causalist, determinist (etc.) can only add nested statements on the ACTION side, or draw specific sorts of connection between these statements and the SUMMARY side – and the rest of my argument in (1-3) works – then they contribute to the constitutive dimension of possibilities in historiography as I have been describing it. This applies to real examples, such as those I drew from Stenton and the examples of medieval actions I described in chapter 19. The charter-making by the Duke of Sandomierz, for instance, can now be analysed – as I effectively already did – like this:

ACTION(charter-making)<(monks retain profit, Sandomierz family reclaim it,  
monks return it as a gift...)>

Some of the examples in chapter 19, perhaps especially that of St. Francis, seem much more like the writing of the *Codes amiatinus*: they require such a complex SUMMARY clause that there seems little point in offering it in the semi-formal packaging I have been using. This, of course, is part of my point from part III: we often have to rely on oblique summaries of the possibilities in a given situation, rather than a satisfactory, fine-grained inventory. Following the possibilistic analyses of sociological concepts and historical judgements I offered in part III, in part V I will try to show that in *Montaillou* the purpose of such concepts and judgements is to grapple with the right side of historical action-sentences – the SUMMARIES. This is what makes sociological concepts relative to actions: terms like ‘city’, ‘war’, or ‘kingdom’ are themselves summaries of patterns of possibilities.

We have not quite reached checkmate. I need to show how the basic structure of historical action-sentences exposed here can help us offer a theory of action. In the next chapter (22), I try to make it even clearer how actions are, as it were, *open* enough to possibilities to make them link into the patterns of possibilities introduced by such concepts and judgements. To do this, I will take an existing theory of action *per se* which seems somewhat counterintuitive, and then show that it makes more sense as a theory of *historical* action along a constitutive dimension of possibilities.

## 22. Possibilities in a Theory of Action

For some reason it has been the fashion among some historians to minimize the impact of the Magyars, who ‘were not a creative factor in the West’. (All this means is that the Magyars did not reach Cambridge.)<sup>403</sup>

### *i. The Cambridge Theory of Action*

Here I will effectively try to reverse the logic of David-Hillel Ruben’s ‘Cambridge Theory of Action’ to show how it can be turned into a theory of *historical* action. Not only will this deepen the account of historical action I have offered already, it will also provide some fairly precise diagrams which will be of exegetical use when we return to *Montaillou*. With this goal in mind, we need to begin by paying attention to how Ruben’s theory itself functions – or does not – on its own terms. In the Cambridge Theory, which Ruben proposed in *Action and Its Explanation*, the problem of posthumous predication is tackled with reference to the concept of a Cambridge Change.<sup>404</sup> Posthumous predication involves cases where new properties can be predicated of someone or their action after death – or after the relevant action has ceased. A famous example of this is Aristotle’s idea at the beginning of the *Nichomachean Ethics* that there may be a sensible question ‘should no man be called

---

<sup>403</sup> Davies 1997: 316. Davies is quoting CW Previt -Orton’s contribution to the *Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, published in 1952 – which hints that his sense of ‘fashion’ might not be quite *  la mode*.

<sup>404</sup> Ruben 2003

happy until he is dead?'.<sup>405</sup> Aristotle also asks whether the fortunes of the living can affect the dead.<sup>406</sup>

The most intuitive interpretation of Aristotle's question is that it asks about the conditions under which *descriptions* can be offered of a person's life.<sup>407</sup> It is not that we think that happiness itself is something which relies on a state of death, but that we need to see a full life before we can judge, in retrospect, that it was fully happy in a rich, Greek sense. If a man is still alive, there is a chance that the final years of his life will be marred by some misfortune. Perhaps his shed blows over or all his sheep die in a storm. What looks like a happy *life* while it is still being lived may turn out to be only incompletely happy, though it is a separate question as to whether one's shed's destruction could completely wipe out the putative happiness of yesteryear.

The idea of Cambridge Change, which Ruben wants to put in contact with puzzles about posthumous predication, was originally proposed by Peter Geach: if something *x* changes in a Cambridge way, it changes purely in terms of its relations.<sup>408</sup> Other things to which *x* is related change, so the relations between *x* and these other things change. Change is ordinarily construed as a change in the properties which can be predicated of some individual. Some properties are relational; so sometimes when a relevant relation changes (where *x* is one of the relata), this changes the relational properties of *x*. The relation, and thus the relational properties of *x*, can change in virtue of one of the relata, which is not *x*, changing.

For example: I might be so many millions of kilometres from our sun at lunchtime but further away by the time I am in bed at midnight. The change in my properties from

---

<sup>405</sup> See Aristotle 1998: I.9-10

<sup>406</sup> Aristotle 1998: I.11

<sup>407</sup> Cf. Solomon 1976

<sup>408</sup> See Geach 1981: 318-323

being so many thousands of kilometres away from the sun at one time to being so many more thousands of kilometres away at another has nothing, let us say, to do with movements I make myself. Imagine that I have been writing all day and that my desk is directly below my bed. Nevertheless, in my relative physical inaction – to say nothing of my literary productivity – something has happened to the relations between my body and the sun in such a way as to effect the properties which can be predicated of me.

According to Geach's idea of Cambridge change, my properties have changed without, or rather irrespective of, any *real* change in me. Nevertheless, my properties have changed, because my properties depend at least in part on my relations with other things. Ruben uses this idea to make sense of his idea that for any given *basic* bodily movement I perform, such as bending my finger, the number of *actions* I perform may be very large. He calls himself a 'prolific theorist' by contrast to his opponent the 'austere theorist' because he thinks that more than one of the many ways in which we can describe my basically bodily movements count genuinely as different *actions* of mine (and therefore different events). The austere theorist, on the contrary, would say we have but one action and many descriptions.

Ruben's first example is killing the queen, which I elaborate slightly: I bend my finger, I pull the trigger of a gun, I hit my target (the queen) with the bullet of my gun, I rupture her right lung. But then: initially she survives, she travels to Balmoral to recuperate. She rests for six months but then dies at 12 o'clock on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November: I have killed the queen. I am not in Balmoral. I may not even have survived as long as she has. When did I kill the queen? Where? Could it be that I was not present when I killed her, if the killing was in Balmoral on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, when I was dead myself or when I was in hiding in Patagonia?

The puzzles this example raises are about how many events we are to count and the extent of my action and the descriptions we can give of it. Ruben argues that the death



of the queen changes the relation between my finger bending and the queen, and therefore constitutes a new property which can be predicated of me in virtue of which I can be said to have undergone a Cambridge Change. I may have acquired this property *post mortem*, but it is nonetheless a property properly predicated of me. This need not underwrite the absurd thought that I can do things when dead; but it does suggest an idea expressed in the passive voice which is only slightly less counterintuitive: that the inventory of my actions can grow despite my death. Death is an extreme example designed to test our thinking about the relationship between action and what happens afterwards.

It is clear that the death of the queen involves further events than could be counted at the time of my finger bending. Time adds a further dimension (literally) to the questions we may wish to ask to clear up the metaphysics of this notional assassination. Had the death happened “immediately”, there would still have been a slight temporal gap between my finger bending, the clicking of the mechanism in my gun, the flight of the bullet, and the internal damage the bullet caused in the queen’s body. Nevertheless, our intuition is that this would happen so quickly that the causal relationship and, perhaps, my proximate intention to kill or harm, makes it unproblematic to call the event a killing without further witness. The time-gap in the version where the queen makes it to Balmoral for six months seems to loosen this intuition because it provides the possibility, at least, for intervening events to weaken the directness of the causal relationship we are willing to place between my finger bending and the death, and this makes it – if not in law – more difficult to understand quite what makes my finger bending a killing.

Ruben’s solution is that the death of the queen adds an event to the set of events which it is relevant to consider in describing my actions. He argues that *as well as* bending my finger, I also killed the queen, and that (i) these are separately countable – though of

course *related* – actions which can be attributed to me, that (ii) my properties change, genuinely, but that (iii) the change I have undergone is a *Cambridge Change*: my properties have changed because my relations have changed. What seems counterintuitive in Ruben's account is that it radically increases the number of actions that a person is held to have performed, where this is understood to mean something more substantial than simply that we can describe their action in lots of ways which it may be relevant to mention depending on our purposes. In virtue of undergoing a Cambridge Change connected to one of my actions, the inventory of my actions expands to include what Ruben calls a 'Cambridge Action'.

The difference between a prolific theorist, which Ruben is, and an austere one is a difference in counting in relation to the kill chain involving the queen I described above. The finger bends, the gun clicks, the bullet flies, the lung ruptures, the queen escapes to Balmoral, rests for six months, then dies. I have bent my finger, shot a gun, shot the queen, wounded the queen, and finally I have killed the queen. If we add certain other circumstantial factors, I may also have begun a revolution, changed the royal line, or provided a Mr. Smith with interesting reading in his newspaper on an otherwise boring day. The austere theorist says that there is but one action which can be described in these many ways. The prolific theorist says that these are all actions. What is beyond doubt is that these chains, from finger bending to the queen's death, from finger bending to Smith's enlivened morning, involve more than the event which is *intrinsic* – as Ruben puts it – to my basic action of finger bending. So, the difference between the austere and prolific theorists only concerns the line between actions and (mere) descriptions, not the events which these actions or mere descriptions depend on.

*ii. Austere and prolific explanations and descriptions*

All this has consequences for explanation. The austere theorist and the prolific theorist will have different views of how the explanation of action works, because they have different views of what actions there are. The austere theorist will say that there is one action in the kill chain above, that it is a finger bending, and that this finger bending can be described as a shooting, a wounding, a killing, an incitement, a political assassination and – for all the Smiths – a “turn of events”. The context of explanation is intensional, which means that not only do the facts we mention matter, but also the descriptions under which we hold them. Explaining Earth’s orbit by mentioning the sun is only an explanation if we describe the sun in the right way. “The fiery god causes our orbit” does not explain our orbit, or at least not as well or in the same way, as a description of the sun as a star with a certain mass and therefore a certain gravitational pull.<sup>409</sup>

Explanation is carried out by *information*, and different verbal formulations can give different information about the same situations. The austere theorist will thus need to explain the finger bending *qua* finger bending in a different way according to whether they describe it as a finger bending, or whether they describe it as a killing. For them, the same event is to be explained – the finger bending – but the cause of its being also describable as a killing will require wider contextual reference. Some puzzles arise in this connection for the austere theorist, but no less for the prolific theorist.

The prolific theorist says that the bending, shooting, wounding, and killing, and (perhaps) the incitement, assassination, and the provision of entertaining interest are *different events* and therefore *different actions*. They are, to put it another way, *different things that I do*. On this view, the different descriptions become available because they

---

<sup>409</sup> Cf. van Fraassen 1980: 23

pick out different actions, so the source of plurality is in action not description. These different actions will require different explanations in virtue of being different actions and not merely different descriptions of the same action. The puzzles that arise for the austere and prolific theorist are quite similar.

For the austere theorist: how can it be legitimate to describe a finger bending as a killing if the finger bending took place six months before and/or a thousand miles away?

Temporarily, the prolific theorist may appear to have the upper hand: if there is more than one action, and therefore more than one event, then the temporal and spatial chasm can be bridged by saying that some of the actions/events took place at one time and place, others at others. This raises a different version of the same sort of puzzle, but it relocates the implausibility in the agent rather than in the actions/events as such. On this 'prolific' view, the finger bending is a different action/event to the killing, in which case the idea that they took place at different times and in different places is not intuitively disturbing.

The 'prolific' account, however, would appear to short-circuit: the bending and the killing are actions of someone. The bending is unproblematic, but the killing appears to take place well after the relevant bodily movements of the agent have stopped and in a place where the agent may never have been. So, it looks like "I was never there, your honour" can no longer be a defence. Straightaway some of us will think this is not so intuitively wrong because we will wonder what 'there' – or 'then' – ought to be construed as meaning in this context: 'there' might not be 'Balmoral' but 'where the fatal bullet was', or the equivalent for time. Indeed, in the kill-chain we have been considering, the gaps of six months and a thousand miles make it plausible to suppose that I might die before the queen. On the 'prolific' view, I will therefore have killed the queen after my own death. Ruben wants us to say that this is (/will be) an action of mine in addition to my shooting the queen.

### iii. Posthumous predication

As we began to consider above, Ruben's Cambridge Theory of Action is grounded in the idea drawn from Geach that merely relational changes elicit new and genuine properties (relational ones) to items which do not undergo any further change – Cambridge Change (C-change). This translates into Ruben's Cambridge Theory of Action in so far as Ruben argues that actions further on down the kill chain, in the example above, involve 'Cambridge Actions' (C-actions), or actions which are produced in a way which is dependent on changes in the relational properties of the basic actions which set-off the chain.<sup>410</sup> The queen dies, so as well as bending my finger I have killed the queen. The purpose of the appeal to C-change, and thence to C-actions, is to attack the premises which makes the time and location problems facing the prolific theorist seem fatal (the numbers for these premises are from Ruben):

(3) If an object *o* changes in place *p* at time *t*, then *o* must exist in *p* at *t*.

(4) If, at time *t*, and in place *p*, *o* has a property *P*, then *o* exists at *t* in *p*.<sup>411</sup>

The intuitions these principles capture can be seen in relation to the queen-killing example above, and two further examples discussed by Ruben. Surely (?) killing the queen involves having the queen die, but my finger bending, shooting and wounding the

---

<sup>410</sup> There is of course an additional puzzle about *detecting* whether we have an instance of real or C-change. As Ruben puts it in relation to an argument of Paul Helm's, we need 'background information'; Ruben 2003: 22; Helm 1977.

<sup>411</sup> Ruben 2003: 9. I have corrected the second '*o*' in (4), which Ruben's text has mistakenly as '*x*'. As he has it, of course, it is probably true but not very useful: *something* must exist at *t* in *p* if *o* has a property *P* there and then!

queen all take place at times and places radically divorced from the time and place of the queen's death – so radically divorced, indeed, that I might die in the interim.

A similar puzzle arises in relation to cases such as a eulogizing of Napoleon Bonaparte:

(6) Napoleon is now being eulogized.

This seems to attribute a property to Napoleon. But if it is uttered now and in London, then Napoleon is dead, and we are not even in the presence of his remains. He died in 1821 on St. Helena. The same problems arise with the production of generations.

Every time someone is born, they become the latest descendent of Adam and Eve – the Last Common Ancestors between the hominid line and the rest of the apes: when a child is born, a newly predicable property is apparently created which attributes a genuine (relational) property to a couple who died about six million years ago. Ruben begins his argument for the C-theory by pointing out that posthumous predication, as in these cases, is not the same as posthumous reference.

Posthumous reference, for our purposes, is unproblematic.<sup>412</sup> The following are Ruben's examples:

(5) Napoleon was emperor of France in 1808.

This is posthumous reference with contemporaneous predication. Napoleon was still alive in 1808. When we utter (5) in 2016, it is only our reference which as it were travels back to Napoleon in 1808; when we get there (again, *as it were*) we find that he is emperor of France. Ruben's point is that the property of being emperor of France is different to the property of being eulogized (now) because Napoleon is not spatiotemporally available to bear *being-eulogized* as a newly acquired property. But he holds nonetheless that it is a genuine property and an example of C-change. If his

---

<sup>412</sup> But see Dummet 2004.

account is acceptable, then (3) and (4) must be false. In fact, Ruben argues that (3) and (4) are false for all and only cases of C-action. He accepts that they hold for real changes.

The Cambridge Theory is thus supposed to indicate, systematically, a set of exceptions which are available for the rules (3) and (4), which usually hold like iron for real actions. Now, Ruben considers a range of different ways in which the puzzle of posthumous predication could be solved without rejecting the apparently highly intuitive principles expressed in (3) and (4). He rejects these alternative solutions to the problem of posthumous predication.<sup>413</sup> However, his counterarguments – which we will not go into here – seem less than convincing, and my view is that he is left defending the Cambridge Theory at all costs and to no apparent purpose. We do not seem to learn anything of substance about action – in history/social science, or more generally. However, I think there is a way to supplement Ruben’s theory with what I have said before about possibilities and action. Not only will this help make what I have said about possibilities more precise, we may also be able to show that Ruben’s theory – whatever its obscurities – alerts us to something important.

---

<sup>413</sup> Ruben considers four possible solutions to the puzzle of posthumous predication. In what follows, (6) refers to the utterance ‘Napoleon is now being eulogized’, encountered above. Here are the four possible solutions: (a) (6) predicates the property, being eulogized, of Napoleon at a time after his death, and hence (4), at least in its unrestricted form, is false (the ‘Cambridge’ solution fleshes this out); (b) (6) does not predicate, of Napoleon, any property at all, so there is no property that (6) ascribes to Napoleon posthumously (see Lombard 1986: 102-4); (c) (6) asserts, of Napoleon or of some temporal segment of Napoleon, that he timelessly has the property of being eulogized, or of being eulogized in 2016; properties ascribed timelessly cannot be had posthumously (see Silverstein 1980); (d) (6) really predicates, of Napoleon, the future tensed property of going to be eulogized; and since this is a property he had while alive, there is no posthumous predication involved – *only*, we might add, *posthumous reference*.

vi. *Cambridge societies?*

Many of the putative Cambridge changes Ruben appeals to as fuel for his C-theory of action involve changes of *social* status or relations: *murderer*, *being eulogised* – and there are more to come. He may be picking-up on something important which is ignored by the ‘austere’ theorist, but to see the weakness in his own ‘prolific’ account we can put some pressure on his reliance on sociologically or anthropologically rich examples – which he seems to treat as philosophical fodder.

As I said above, Cambridge change is a change in an objects relational properties, so it is logically very close to the idea of posthumous predication. Ruben put things thus:

On the classical account of change, an object *o* changes at *t* iff *o* acquires a property at *t* that it did not have before *t*. The inadequacy of the classical account (as I intimated earlier) can be seen in the examples above, and in many others like them, since Socrates gains a property that he did not have before when a new schoolchild comes to admire him, and yet he does not, in the most intuitive sense, really change at all

[...]

Cambridge Changes are Cambridge qua Changes: the change in Socrates every time a fresh schoolchild comes to admire him, the change in the number six each time it becomes or ceases to become the number of someone’s children, the change in Adam and Eve each time they acquire a new descendent.<sup>414</sup>

The example does not seem very convincing and this may tempt us into adopting the ‘austere’ view. One might think that *Socrates* does *not* gain a property when he is admired by a new schoolchild. One might want to say instead that the schoolchild never really admires Socrates but rather admires his works and imagines that they were written by someone who they *would* admire were they to meet him, or were they able to

---

<sup>414</sup> Ruben 2003: 23



meet him. The child is assuming, of course, that all Socrates' best ideas did not really come from his wife Xanthippe, who we will encounter again shortly.

The suspicion that Ruben is using sociological or anthropological examples to smuggle-in unwarranted assumptions about change may arise again in relation to Ruben's example of the change 'in' Adam and Eve. One may think that the change is precisely not 'in' them, but without them. Ruben may rely a little too heavily on intuition at this point. Consider what he says here:

Notice that to predicate even a Cambridge change of an object is to predicate of the object a perfectly good property. To say of some person that he has acquired a new cousin upon the birth of a child to his aunt or uncle, is to ascribe a perfectly genuine property to that person, but it is *not* to ascribe to him a perfectly genuine change.<sup>415</sup>

It is tempting to pressure the intuition Ruben smothers with superlatives. If getting a cousin is *not* or does *not* involve a perfectly genuine change, then is not doubt cast on whether it also involves a 'perfectly genuine' property? Or might it, at least, cast doubt on whether it always involves a genuine property? And might not those cases where it *does* involve such a property be precisely those cases where the alleged Cambridge change is in fact, as Lombard suggests, reducible to real changes?<sup>416</sup> In that case, the 'austere' theorists argument for a proliferation of descriptions, not action-events, is strengthened. What the 'austere' theorist *fails* to give us, however, is an account for what of substance lies beneath the *social* descriptions which Ruben relies on.

Consider the getting of a cousin in posthumous and non-posthumous predication. Even while alive, if my aunt gives birth there is still a sense in which I do not become the baby's cousin until I am aware of it. A case can be made, for example, for saying that the reality of my biological kinship is what my society – my other relations – will refer

---

<sup>415</sup> Ruben 2003: 23

<sup>416</sup> Lombard 1986: 102-4

to in order to convince me to become my cousin's cousin (as it were) in a full and active sense. The relevant bit of reality only has a particular significance because, as an anthropological theory might suggest, it is held to have that significance among certain groups of people. At the very least, there is an anthropological and not a merely philosophical argument to be had about the reality of kinship between the living.

Things might be seen to get even shakier for Ruben's use of the idea of Cambridge change when we consider kinship with the dead. While in one sense we maintain our kinship systems by extending the relations they contain to the dead, we also sometimes speak differently. In the first way of speaking, if I visit the grave of the child my aunt bore but who (the child) died before I was born, then I may be told that it is the grave of my dead cousin. To see the second way of speaking, imagine that my aunt was the first of her sisters to have a child, and my mother the second. Given that my aunt only had one child (let us suppose), might we not say, in virtue of her (the child's) loneliness, that it is a shame she never had a cousin? If the function of our dead-cousin talk is to insulate and, perhaps, reify our kinship system, then there may be a sense in which such boundary-marking usages do not quite mean what they appear to say – or at least we may create confusion by not recognizing this more salient function.

A similar concern could be raised for Ruben's importing Jaegwon Kim's argument that the imprisoned Xanthippe became a widow at Socrates' execution.<sup>417</sup> In one sense, she did, but she may need additionally at least to become aware of Socrates' death in order to become a widow in a fuller sense. If we are contemporaneous Athenians, we may insist that she became a widow just as the hemlock kicked in hard, and if we met her before she found out (a state requiring her widowing already to have happened, in one sense) we might wonder at her relatively positive mood and ask her if she knew she was a widow. (Yet perhaps she will be enjoying her new freedom from the examined life!)

---

<sup>417</sup> See Kim 1974

Alternatively, however, we are presented with a usage of the concept ‘widow’ where protection of the kinship system itself is its salient feature, not the attribution of a property.

Consider that Radcliffe-Brown pointed out some time ago that kinship relations cross over into death. Some sort of categorized relationship with the dead (like *widow*) is what sustains the living lineage:

For the individual, his primary duties are those to his lineage. These include duties to those who are now living, but also to those who have died and to those who are not yet born. In the carrying out of these duties he is controlled and inspired by the complex system of sentiments of which we may say that the object on which they are centred is the lineage itself, past, present, and future. It is primarily this system of sentiments that is expressed in the rites of the cult of the ancestors. The social function of the rites is obvious: by giving solemn and collective expression to them the rites reaffirm, renew, and strengthen those sentiments on which the social solidarity depends.<sup>418</sup>

As I suggested in part II, system-concepts here – even when they are used consciously within societies – refer to *possibilities*: lineage-based sentiments help to sustain a continuity of possibilities. The availability of a plausible sociological or anthropological theory along these lines casts philosophical doubt on Ruben’s taking it that the examples of Cambridge change we have mentioned involve real – sorry, ‘perfectly genuine’ – property acquisition. But the ‘austere’ theorist does not have much to say about the significance of what they take to be these ‘mere’ descriptions. If we are able to view the functioning of terms like *widow* ironically, from outside the social system in which they are used, then Ruben’s reliance on what we might call

---

<sup>418</sup> Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 164; see Trautmann, Harnick & Mitani 2011 for a recent discussion of kinship and lineage relations along similar lines, though in their much longer term.

“social properties” to support the idea of Cambridge actions might seem dubious. However, I do not think that his appeal to social examples is simply cheating.

The theory I have been developing in this thesis suggests there is a middle way: relational changes involve more than changes of description but less than ‘genuine’ changes of properties. Rather, they involve changes in historical situations, and consequently changes in the possibilities for what people might do *next*. In what follows, I offer a way of reversing Ruben’s theory in this way, making the role of possibilities explicit in diagrams corresponding to the ‘historical action-sentences’ I analysed above.

#### *v. Incompleteness of the Cambridge Theory*

Despite Ruben’s analysis, we in fact know a limited amount about the logical structure of his proposed ‘Cambridge actions’. Some diagrams will help us make the gaps clear – and this will clear the way for me to fill them with possibilities. As we have seen Ruben say already, he is inclined towards a prolific view of action, where there are lots of actions which are not identical to each other. However, on his analysis, we do lots of things (actions) *by* doing our other actions. The picture he offers is consequently one where real actions depend on having events which are intrinsic to them, but where Cambridge actions do not but instead depend on relations between the intrinsic events of real actions and subsequent causal chains. Real actions for Ruben are basic actions. Let us get to grips with this a little more systematically.

All of the types of item that I have just mentioned are defined by Ruben in terms of their position in action-causal chains. Action-causal chains are chains of events which begin with an action (though presumably there is no requirement that they should fully originate in that action). He defines a *basic action* as any action which is not performed

by doing some other action: finger bending is his favourite example. Looking down in scale, bending my finger is a basic action, when I do it, not bending my finger half way, because I bend my finger half way *by* bending my finger. (I note that this creates some exceptions to my reading of his view as being that all real actions are basic actions: as he says, one can bend one's finger *by* turning one's hand, in which case turning one's hand and not bending one's finger would appear to be the basic action.<sup>419</sup>) I will not run through Ruben's arguments for adopting this approach to basicness.<sup>420</sup>

The 'by' relation is put to further work in Ruben's account of intrinsic and extrinsic events relative to actions and the identity and reality of actions. Again, I will not go through his reasons for adopting these views, but instead simply present his analysis. Let us return to the kill-chain involving, at one end, the death of the queen. Ruben's analysis of basic, real, and Cambridge actions involves seeing them as playing different roles on similar chains. To begin with, however, he distinguishes between different sorts of chain involving different mixes and relations of events, actions, and causes. We will consider action chains and action-causal chains. I am going to represent these diagrammatically and then explain their significance for the Cambridge Theory of Action.

A causal chain is a series of events which are connected causally. In the diagrams below I call an event '*e*' and use ' $\rightarrow$ ' to represent causal relations, '*\_ causes \_*'; any

---

<sup>419</sup> Ruben 2003: 69. One may of course wonder whether this is really the intuition supported by the rest of his theory. If I do not, as it were, *activate* the muscles in my finger, my finger can still bend, but do I *bend my finger*? One answer might be that although I do, it is only in relation to my finger as an object and not as an intrinsic part of me, in which case the finger bending is a Cambridge event and my finger bending a merely Cambridge action – and therefore not real. If all cases can be dealt with like this, then all real actions will be basic actions, all basic actions real, and neither will be Cambridge actions, casting doubt on whether there is such a category at all.

<sup>420</sup> Lynch 2017 argues that basic actions are divisible, i.e. that a basic action can include other actions, but only if they do not amount to separate achievements. Here I treat this as a side-issue: wherever we locate the basic actions, my diagrams apply – even if there are no absolutely basic actions and all basicness is relative to the context. Lynch notes that his analysis is an alternative to Ruben's: Lynch 2017: 317.

event on the left-hand side of this relation is a cause, any event on the right an effect, and any one event can be both. The first issue of real interest is the way we will represent the relationship between actions ('A') and events ('e'): Ruben thinks that actions have intrinsic events. We will indicate that an event is intrinsic to an action by having a vertical line connect the two and then placing the relevant event in brackets. The following is an analysis of an action and its intrinsic event:

A  
|  
(e)

If we include a series of actions like this in the context of a causal chain events, we get something like this:

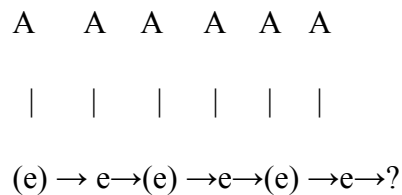
A        A        A        A  
|        |        |        |  
(e) → e → (e) → e → (e) → e → (e) → ?

Depending on the outcome of any debate about whether all real actions are basic actions, this represents either all real actions or all basic actions.<sup>421</sup> Ruben thinks that intrinsic actions are *insufficient* for the actions they are intrinsic to. McCann argues from the propensity of the event [(e)] to sometimes not feature in an action (A) to the

---

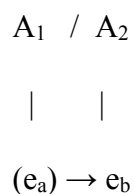
<sup>421</sup> This diagram, the complexity of which I shall continue to add to in successive versions, is partly based on a similar diagram constructed by Danto 1985: 269. However, Danto is concerned there with the relationship between psychological and social events (that is to say, individual psychological states and non-individual social states). I claim, later, that my analysis explains how to fit basic actions into a social context, so our interests are not unrelated. My claim that action is to be explained with reference to future possibilities may be construed as one way to interpret Danto's insistence that we know about history by *narrating* it – see above and Ricoeur 1983 and 2004; Ankersmit 1983, 2001 and 2012; White 1973 and 1978; Kuukkanen 2015; and Fairbrother 2017.

conclusion that intrinsic events are insufficient for their actions. However, Ruben points out that McCann's argument only shows that *types* of events are insufficient for *types* of actions, which leaves it open that, in token case, the circumstances make it such that *(e)* is sufficient for *A*. Instead, he prefers to argue for the *insufficiency* conclusion directly by appealing to Cambridge actions: in these cases, he says, the event which is intrinsic to a Cambridge action is some real event but one which *fails* to be a real action (*of mine*). On this view, then, we ought to draw a diagram including actions which happen without adding to our inventory of (real) intrinsic events. There will then be a question of if, and if so how, real actions and Cambridge actions are related to each other in action chains (chains representing as comprising only actions):



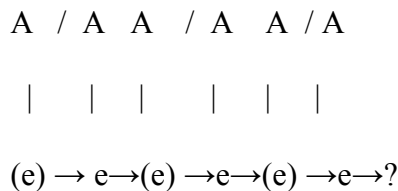
So here we have a causal chain with some indication of the actions it involves, but little idea of the connections – type, direction – between the actions. What we *can* tell from it is that it shows, in Ruben's vocabulary, a real action followed by a Cambridge action, followed by a real action – and so on to (?) we know not what, where or when.

Consider just one case of a real action followed by a Cambridge one:



Call this the ‘Cambridge Complex’ (CC): it is the smallest possible complex of elements which form a Cambridge action. What happens here? First someone *acts*<sub>1</sub>, with the first *event*<sub>a</sub> intrinsic to this action: the agent bends his finger<sub>1</sub>/ the killer’s finger bends<sub>e</sub>. Then, on Ruben’s account, *e*<sub>a</sub> causes *e*<sub>b</sub> – the queen dies – which means that the agent, as well as bending his finger<sub>1</sub> has also killed the queen<sub>2</sub>. But, as we will now expect from Ruben, the Cambridge Theory requires we say that *e*<sub>b</sub> is a mere event, and therefore not an event serving as intrinsic to a particular action – and certainly not to *A*<sub>2</sub>. How is it, then, that our agent has acted again?

Ruben’s thought is that it is in virtue of *e*<sub>b</sub> that I have been enabled to kill the queen *by* *A*<sub>1</sub> – (*e*<sub>a</sub>). So, between any ordered pair [real action/Cambridge action] is a relation something like ‘The agent *by*’, but not between [Cambridge action/real action] pairs, because the point is that a real action’s having an intrinsic event is what enables its combination with causal chains to produce new things that the agent has done. So, for an action-causal chain we ought to have a diagram like this, with ‘/’ as the ‘by’ relation:



I bend my finger and *by* so doing kill the queen; then (through remorse) I turn up at her funeral and *by* so doing insult her. For the agent, then, single pushes result in doing many things. In this case, each push results in a single further action. Yet, we know nothing about the precise character of this *by*-relation, nothing about the *type* of causal chains which can extend from my real action to create new Cambridge actions, and, finally, nothing about the *point* of making claims about Cambridge actions – beyond Ruben’s doubtful thought that positing them makes sense of our intuitions.



Now, in what follows I suggest accepting the core elements and structure of Ruben's theory. But I shall nest them in what above I called 'possibilistic space'. By doing this, we can reach a fairly precise analysis of how actions function as *conditions* when they are considered from a historical point of view. This will also show how larger-scale descriptions of situations – such as those using sociological concepts – link seamlessly with historical actions *qua* conditions. I offer this alternative analysis in sections 7 and 8 below, but first I want to point out how little we know about the 'by' relation, on which hinges Ruben's entire theory. A reader who is already persuaded that Ruben's theory is dubious and wants to push on to get to what I say might skip this section, although it does prepare the some of the ground for my own proposal. Perhaps on a second reading these details will seem important.

*vi. The causal remainder of the 'by' relation*

Something is missing from the 'Cambridge Complex' (CC) which Ruben probably should have included in his argument: a detailed consideration of the 'by' relation. The essential inclusion of a by-relation in CC shows us that we are not dealing with causation simpliciter. Rather, we are interested in what Goldman calls *causal generation*.<sup>422</sup> This happens a level up from simple causation and concerns complex patterns of causation and action. We rely on a range of different causal relations and actions at a lower-level for the higher-order pattern to emerge. If a single agent were in charge, they would achieve the higher-order pattern *by* effecting all the lower-level events – but causal generation can happen spontaneously out of interactions between multiple agents. By giving a more detailed account of the by-relation, I will specify

---

<sup>422</sup> Goldman 1970: 20-30

some of the gaps in Ruben's account which can be filled-in using the conditional possibilities from my own theory.

The problem is that causal generation, while supporting some sort of use of 'by', also includes causal relations themselves. Although Ruben is keen to press that the 'by' relation stands between the real action and the Cambridge action – 'He killed her by shooting her' is an intuitive example – he does not ask what further 'by' relations might need to be recognized in CC to see what exactly is going on with Cambridge action. Plausibly, a further 'by' relation could be placed between the causal consequence of the real action's intrinsic event and the alleged Cambridge action. This is because it is in fact *false* that the agent does  $A_2^c$  *by* doing  $A_1^r$ ; they do it *by* doing  $A_1^r$  *and by*  $e_b$ 's occurrence, as my diagrams make plain. Already, I suggest, we are dealing with action in a wider, historical world, and not simply in the world of the individual agent.

Now, my last claim about the 'by' relation – '*and by*  $e_b$ 's occurrence' – sounds very clumsy. This was unavoidable because there is a genuine difficulty over how exactly to express the inclusion of  $e_b$  as an additional 'by' relatum of  $A_2^c$ . From one angle, it seems wrong to say '*the agent does*  $A_2^c$  *by*  $e_b$ ', because  $e_b$  is not something that the agent has done. It is, from one angle, simply something that happens *after* their action. This is not the case with  $e_a$  however – depending on whether we are willing to say that the agent *does* the event which is intrinsic to their basic action. This again though is clumsy. Rather,  $e_b$  is something that happens *because of* something the agent does.

Part of the difficulty concerns whether the 'by' relation in these cases needs to be unpacked as 'by doing' and not simply 'by'. One reason for thinking that it should is that whatever participle of 'to do' is used at the beginning of the sentence plausibly transmits to the 'by' relation itself: *to do* ( $\phi$  *by*  $\psi$ -ing). Here the 'by' is in the scope of 'to do', but I suppose we could write: (*to do*  $\phi$ ) *by*  $\psi$ -ing. The difference here is similar

to the difference between using tenses as adverbial modifiers and then the Quineian view where properties are held timelessly by their bearers (see above).

Despite (possible) appearances, this choice is neutral between Ruben and the austere theorist: one might think that the adverbial version is more supportive of the Cambridge theory because it seems to split the actions,  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  – but the scope of ‘to do’ tells us nothing about how to quantify the action(s) involved and consequently nothing about whether we should treat ‘ $\phi$ ’ and ‘ $\psi$ ’ as descriptions of actions or action-tokens. So I do not think I am begging any questions, at least not against Ruben or the austere theorist, if I adopt the first analysis. It suggests that ‘by’ ought to involve actions, or descriptions of actions, on both sides. If this remains obscure, consider that the only sort of thing which can be *done* in the sense I am discussing here is an action.

What this suggests in turn is that it is wrong to include the consequence of an action, and not an action/intrinsic-event-of-an-action as a relatum in a ‘by’ relation. But, to the extent to which this use of our language is ordinary, the argument does rely purely on ordinary usage. Accordingly, we can find a solution in ordinary usage: it is unnatural to say ‘I  $\phi$ -ed by e’s occurrence’, except where ‘ $\phi$ ’ involves being a passive recipient like ‘I profited by the stock-market’s crash’ – which is irrelevant because we are considering action. We might want to replace ‘by’ with ‘through’ in cases where the second (alleged) relatum is a mere event. But ‘I  $\phi$ -ed through e’ results in even worse examples in plain English, to the extent to which I cannot think of any which make sense: ‘I killed her through her bleeding’ is not entirely opaque (in the ordinary, non-Quineian sense), but it is more like a reconstruction of an enigmatic idiom than plain English.

The solution is to notice that we are never dealing with 1-1 action-relatum cases with mere events as the sole right-hand-side relatum: the agent needs their action to have some effects. If a mere event does feature in a ‘by’-type relation, it is always paired with a real action. So, in fact the real predicate we are after is ‘\_ by \_ and through \_’ or

‘A by A and through e’. The ‘through e’ part tells us something about the means involved when the agent A’s by A-ing. We thus have two ways to express routes through CC ending in  $A_2^c$  – in plain English. On one hand, we can use ‘because’: ‘I killed her by shooting her because it left her open to infection’. Offered in an explanatory context, this can be paraphrased as ‘I *killed* her, rather than merely wounding her, by shooting her because it left her open to infection’. Alternatively, we can use the modified ‘by’-type predicate we have just found: ‘I shot her by bending my finger and through the wind remaining steady’. (Someone might say that the wind here works as a background condition not a cause, but the precise flight of the bullet to the precise wound it creates is certainly caused by the character of the wind in its path.)

The whole point of Cambridge action is that it involves cases of real action with proceeding causal chains which mean that something else is done. Ruben’s account relies on the fact that the ‘by’ relation runs in the opposite direction to causality – this is the component that lets him deal with posthumous predication. But I have just suggested that it includes an aspect which runs in the same direction as causation: in English, this is achieved with the words ‘through’, ‘because’ or – at a stretch – ‘by’. Every time the ordinary ‘by’ relation occurs in a case of CC, fully unpacking it reveals an ineliminable causal relation at its side. Although this *can* be expressed with ‘by’, it is a ‘by’ indicating a causal diversion, a *via* relation, so to say, not the ordinary ‘*doing x by doing y*’ sort of ‘by’ which Goldman analysed in *A Theory of Human Action*.<sup>423</sup> Suspicion is thus raised once again that the part that runs backwards, the ordinary ‘by’, represents the inclusion of a new description (austere theorist) and *not* a new property or action (Ruben). The effects on the causal chain somehow become attributable to me because of something I did earlier, not because anyone really thinks I have done something new.

---

<sup>423</sup> Goldman 1970: 20-30

In a sense, Ruben agrees with this, because part of what he says to make his theory plausible is that Cambridge actions are not *real* actions. Yet, he does not give us much of an account for why departing from real actions is illuminating, beyond that he thinks it provides the best account of our intuitions. So part of the trouble with accepting his theory is the still mysterious *function* of the ‘Cambridge’ qualifier. What, we might ask, perhaps too bluntly, is the point?

Part of the mystery of Cambridge actions seems to come from the fact that a fuller analysis of the CC complex shows us that although Ruben’s ‘by’ relation runs in the opposite direction to causality, it is itself composed of causal relations. The austere theorist thinks this means the Cambridge action can be eliminated. But hold on to Ruben’s picture for a moment: the mystery of Cambridge action comes from seeing that all the basic relations we can find in the CC complex run *into* the Cambridge action, but nothing seems to come out of it. Thus it appears as what some might call a “nomological dangler”. In a picture driven by an interest in *cause*, it is more plausible to say that descriptions of action can dangle like this, but not actions as such. What Ruben ends up saying, then, is made mysterious by the very causality-based picture he shares with the austere theorist, but we should ask whether there is an alternative picture.

#### *vii. Event-condition duality in the Cambridge theory*

In fact, I want to turn Ruben’s whole picture around and treat *all* the elements we have been discussing as conditions and never causes as such. What I want to arrive at is a theory of action *and* the relations between actions. Mine is a compromise position between the austere theorist and the Cambridge theorist. From a causalist point of view, the austere theorist seems to win hands down. I think that the alternative Ruben began

to open-up with the Cambridge theory should in fact be treated as showing us a kind of *analysis* of action radically different but compatible with everything the austere theorist has to say (apart from the word ‘mere’ in ‘mere description’). They are compatible simply in virtue of being different sorts of analysis, and Ruben should drop the idea that he has hit upon a novel ontology.

Let us look again at the CC and ask what *conditional* relationships it contains:

$$A_1^r / A_2^c$$

$$| \quad |$$

$$(e_a) \rightarrow e_b$$

The conditional view I am simply involves reversing the causal view, so we can just find what previously we treated as causal relations and reverse them to obtain an initial list of conditional relationships:

(i) The first event is a condition of the second event.

(ii) The first action is a condition of the first event.

This is just what both Ruben and the austere theorist accept, but adjusted for my vocabulary of ‘conditions’. The first event is a condition of the second *because* it causes it. The first action is a condition of the first event because that event is *intrinsic* to that action, so that event (token) is dependent on its corresponding action. These things are neutral between the austere and prolific views.

More controversial are the following:

(iii) The first action (with its intrinsic event) is a condition of the second “action”.

(iv) The second event is a condition of the second “action”.

If (iii) and (iv) are true, they express necessary but not sufficient conditions for the corresponding Cambridge action in the CC. Let us accept (iii) and (iv) for the sake of argument: they do not obviously get us any further in considering whether “Cambridge actions” are mere descriptions or not, but they do lay some important groundwork.

The problem with Cambridge actions on the causalist picture, as I said above, is that all the basic relations seem to run *into* them and nothing runs out of them. I argued that even the ‘by’ relation, in this context, is not quite as it seems in Ruben’s analysis because it includes an implicit (and causal) *via* relation, so the austere theorist has no problem saying that because the agent does the second “action” by the second *simply via* a mere causal chain, the second “action” is in fact to be seen as a mere description of the first. On this reset conditional picture, however, the same cannot be said: we will construe the Cambridge action itself as a *condition* of future action, in which case the relations we are interested in (conditional ones) run both into and out of the Cambridge action. This registers that we are dealing with the ‘event-condition duality’ of actions, which I argued above is characteristic of a historical perspective.

The difficulty with this, of course, is that our knowledge of the Cambridge action’s *qualities* as a condition must be uncertain, because it will function as a condition for possible future actions. However, this is a problem besetting our attempts at knowledge and explanation with reference to Cambridge actions, not our logical analysis of them. The discussions of Hawthorn and Stinchcombe above made it clear that judgements about possibilities introduce a degree of imagination into the historical perspective, and there is no reason to expect anything less with respect to our theory of action.

*viii. Possibilities in the Cambridge theory*

We need to know more exactly how possible actions fit into the analysis. Above I said that the Cambridge Complex, or CC, was the smallest complex of elements which recognizably includes a Cambridge action. Here it is again:

$$A_1^r / A_2^c$$

$$| \quad |$$

$$(e_a) \rightarrow e_b$$

The problem now is that this is represented mostly in terms of causal relations. What is not causal in this picture looks doubtful: the Cambridge and causal-generative bits which I have suggested seem dubious against a causal background. So how do we adjust it to include conditional relations and possible actions?

One way might be to observe that if we are saying that Cambridge actions (along with all the other elements) now feature as conditions, they need to be identified as conditions *of* something to make the analysis complete. I have said that they are conditions of future actions, so perhaps we need to revert to a diagram which includes future real and Cambridge actions:

$$A / A \quad A / A \quad A / A$$

$$| \quad | \quad | \quad | \quad | \quad |$$

$$(e) \rightarrow e \rightarrow (e) \rightarrow e \rightarrow (e) \rightarrow e \rightarrow ?$$



Here, all the ‘A’s without intrinsic events are alleged Cambridge actions. Consider the first, left to right. On the conditional/possibilistic view I am proposing, we will say that it functions as a condition of the second real action. We can now ask more searching questions about the relation of conditionality which I say obtains between the alleged Cambridge action and the action or actions for which it serves as a condition.

Let us go back to a familiar example. If I bend my finger (real action) and then kill the queen (Cambridge action), then *the next thing I might do*, given the extraordinary threat the state now presents to me as a regicide, is to hide somewhere. Describing how I hide at the atomistic level we are employing here is likely to involve a very complex chain of actions and events, so I here I will simplify things and make hiding myself a bit like shooting the queen, which usually it will not be. Imagine that I am so conveniently located that when I realize I have shot and killed the queen, a single basic action (bodily movement) suffices for hiding: I *jump* into a box. My killing the queen is a condition of my jumping into a box (real action) and hiding (Cambridge action). My jumping into a box and the effect this has on the perception of those who are looking for me are conditions of my hiding. But is the *hiding* here an action? Ruben will say that it is. The austere theorist will say that it is a warranted description of my action, which can also be described more basically as jumping.

Neither of these gets us to the conditional/possibilistic view where we will construe a description of my action as ‘hiding’ to involve both my basic action and a vector of possible next steps. The possibilities are grounded by my basic action combined with a further causal surround, and this – the CC – constitutes a single historical *condition*. As our descriptions of actions become richer, we imply more and more judgements about the relationship between the action itself, its causal surround, and the vector of possibilities this historical condition indicates. We do not need to identify which actions *hiding* is a condition of – creeping out behind the state’s back, provoking

insurrection, backing down in tears and hoping for mercy, etc. – we just have to take it that it creates the condition for a changed vector of possible next steps.

Now, there are at least two things misleading about the diagram of the CC above. The first is that it represents the relations between events as an unbroken chain. If the mere event the Cambridge action depends on has a subsequent and purely causal consequence, then the event which follows from it will be a mere event too, and it will not be a candidate for the intrinsic event of a real action. On the causal picture, then, the event chain must be a broken or splitting one. We will not try to represent this diagrammatically because it will not add much and it would be very complicated. On the conditional picture, however, we can leave the chain as it is because although the causal link between a mere event caused by an action's intrinsic event and the event which follows may not be a direct one, it *is* directly a condition of it (even if this relation itself depends on a more complex context). So, if we are to use the diagram above on the conditional picture, we need to remember that the arrows can no longer indicate causation but conditionality.

This is not the only problem, however. The diagram above is rather too convenient in one way, so, in another way, it obscures the work that the conditional/possibilistic theory is doing. With it, we imagine analyzing a sequence of actions and events which have already happened, but the conditional/possibilistic theory is based on *merely* conditional relations.<sup>424</sup> An appropriately adjusted analysis of the CC ought then to include merely possible future actions. I suggest changing it to represent mere possibilities in grey instead of black. Here is one attempt:

---

<sup>424</sup> Cf. Ricoeur 1983: 357

$$\begin{array}{c}
 A \quad / \quad A \quad A \\
 | \quad | \quad | \\
 (e) \rightarrow e \rightarrow (e)
 \end{array}$$

The now ghostly third “action” and its intrinsic “event” is now seen as a mere possibility. The symbols representing it are thus ‘flaccid designators’.<sup>425</sup> What this makes clear is that there is a further problem with referring to future actions relative to their conditions, because it is not plausible to think that all conditions will only make a single future action or event possible. Instead, depending on the sort of basic action the case involves, we will be dealing with a restricted vector of often multiple future possibilities.<sup>426</sup>

Nevertheless, viewing all the elements as conditions means that as events unfold (the bottom line in our diagrams) an agent’s basic action changes *qua* condition because its quality as a condition is dependent on the vector of possibilities it contributes to restricting. It determines this vector by fitting into the world in a particular way. What the diagram with grey for possibilities fails to make clear, however, is that the merely possible future actions are what fixes a *condition* (C) where previously Ruben had a Cambridge action. This condition emerges at the same time as the putative Cambridge action, but it needs to be represented as grounding future possibilities. So, we can complete the conditional/possibilistic analysis of action by making this distinction between conditions and possible future actions explicit:

---

<sup>425</sup> See Kripke 1981

<sup>426</sup> See Rescher 2003

$$A / C < [A^1 \dots A^x]$$

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$(e) \rightarrow e < [(e)^1 \dots (e)^x]$$

So, now we have a condition, *C*, where previously we had a strange sort of action which I have been at a loss to make any sense of. It is a condition of the agent's future action. What this final diagram makes clear is that this future action is to be understood as a range. Whereas previously we put a grey *A* as a flaccid designator of future possibilities, now we can make it clear that a range of future possible *real* actions is what makes the condition what it is. I have used '<' to indicate the opening of this range, both of real actions themselves and the intrinsic events which make them real. The diagram is still only semi-formal, but it is better than my previous attempts because it unpacks the role of possibilities in judgements about the situations in which actions are done in a way which neither the austere theorist nor the prolific theorist can manage. The overall structure matches exactly the 'historical action-sentences' I analysed above: with an action on the left and a summary of possibilities on the right. Now we understand better the involvement of the two sides. We can now attempt to put the apparatus I have developed in this thesis – the analysis of action here, together with the analysis of concepts and judgements in part III – to work.

## ***PART FIVE: MONTAILLOU – CONCLUDING COMMENTARIES***

### **23. The Shepherd's Destiny**

#### *i. Foresight and fatalism*

Let us return to *Montaillou*, and in the first instance to Pierre Maury, the shepherd whose sense of 'destiny' LeRoy Ladurie holds up to show how the *montalionsais* saw the meaning of their lives and what sense they had of their identity.<sup>427</sup> He – the historian – treats this as a question to which the answer, if we can find it, will be a 'pastoral philosophy, or [...] a philosophy of Montaillou'.<sup>428</sup> I suggested above (II.7) that the matter of Maury's destiny presents some difficulties because it seems to be founded on a basic and unexplained insistence. If we are searching for a comprehensible 'philosophy of Montaillou' which would either explain Maury's behaviour or help us to understand better the *montalionsais* world, then the dogmatism of Maury's *statements* of destiny seems very unhelpful: 'And' – so he emphatically underlines his commitment to his fate – 'I will continue to live like this in times to come'.<sup>429</sup> Luther-like, he can do *nicht anders*.<sup>430</sup> At first this strikes us as dogmatic; but in a moment's reflection we will demand to know what underlies this dogma, and so we are pushed on from accepting Maury at his word and instead we have to try to

---

<sup>427</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190

<sup>428</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 190

<sup>429</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 191

<sup>430</sup> Cf. LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 449, where the similar fatalism of Bernard Franca is said to remind us of Luther, 'but a stunted Luther [*Luther petit pied*]'.

understand how his life fits into his world. The driving force of his life will be found, if anywhere, in the underside of his obscure speech.<sup>431</sup>

LeRoy Ladurie's discussion of Maury's destiny raises and solves problems in approximately equal measure. It certainly throws down the gauntlet to the detailed possibilistic theory we can (in a moment) derive by putting together the pieces we made in III and IV: at least *prima facie*, LeRoy Ladurie moves from the mystery of Maury's destiny to the mystery of its *origins* in a broader mediterranean sense of destiny from which it may have been derived. The Western Mediterranean, he says, is full of fatalistic cultures, from the pre-Islamic 'Maghrébins' (who now we would call Berber), the pre-Christian Mediterranean of St. Augustine, through Islamic North Africa and Al-Andalus, to the sense of Grace sustaining medieval occidental Christianity from Italy to Spain, Maury would have been surrounded by a web of fates in which, inevitably, he would have been caught:

"The grand shepherds of the high mountain"<sup>432</sup> who, here before the Renaissance, in their composite calendar [*calendrier-compost*], give the most complete picture of the relationships of power which unite the macrocosm with the microcosm: astrology, through the twelve signs of the zodiac, will in effect dictate its law in the *Compost* of twelve months of the agricultural year, and of twelve periods – composing seventy-two years in total – which divide the life of man.<sup>433</sup>

The small – in cosmic terms – self of the "grand shepherd" is thus at least semi-conscious of being a reflection of the ways of the universe. One might note a similar

---

<sup>431</sup> This presumes that his expressions of destiny express this life, and not the effort or aspiration required for such a life.

<sup>432</sup> A 'grand' shepherd here connotes something like a master shepherd in regular control of a large herd. Their relative independence at this time in the Pyrenes is not to be obscured by images of shepherds elsewhere working subserviently for a lord in a feudal system, nor with irregularly employed shepherds who would look to be paid for working others' herds: the 'hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not', as the King James Bible has it; 1865: John 10:12.

<sup>433</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 192

attitude in Leibniz, discussed in IV: the more general attitude of fatalism in Montaigne is described later in terms of a man's essence being held in the 'macrocosmic necessity' of the universe.<sup>434</sup> The man follows the year. This seems to place us back into the causal picture – however loose the notion of causation – which I have been trying to put aside and which caused Ruben such trouble: where actions are to be treated either as causal antecedents or as consequents, here as consequents.

Indeed, LeRoy Ladurie suggests that in view of the many fatalistic influences he *might* have been exposed to, his own fatalism is 'overdetermined [*surdeterminé*]'.<sup>435</sup> Below we will put the pieces from III and IV together and see if they withstand the pressure of being confronted with these (from the point of view of the theory) difficult passages from *Montaigne*. There is at least a chink in the armour of the causal picture in LeRoy Ladurie's *reason* for saying that Maury's having a sense of destiny is 'overdetermined'. The reason is *not* a fixed causal antecedent, but rather that there is an 'overlapping of possible influences'.<sup>436</sup> While this *may* mean "*whatever the cause was, it must have been a fatalistic culture*", this depends entirely on how we interpret what 'influences' are. As with Duccio, the difficulty of pinning-down a single influence may lead us to use the various possibilities as ways to interpret what Maury's sense of destiny *was* and not so much in an attempt to explain what he did. We will return to this; but before we do there is another flash of possibilism in LeRoy Ladurie's description of how a man fits into the years through the zodiac.

It is not that the year simply *dictates* the cycle of work and the (ambitiously long, for the period) life-course. This would suggest a direct mechanism of dictation which would require some sort of explanation, were LeRoy Ladurie to insist upon it. He

---

<sup>434</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 448

<sup>435</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 192

<sup>436</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 192

provides none. Rather, the future is invoked, but not to a partner in an interaction, as in Allert's analysis of greeting, but rather to the reader: the zodiac *will dictate* work and life. The fatalism which LeRoy Ladurie says is characteristic of the philosophy or *mentalité* of Montaillou is thus represented from an external perspective. The difference in tense which indicates this is small and, by itself, too subtle as evidence; but it does introduce an explicit judgement of the future. Now, a slightly unexpected tense can be explained away: it could be that LeRoy Ladurie is simply saying that the zodiac *dictates* life and work *and will continue to do so*. This would treat the future simply as the repetition of a known present. It would, as I suggested, require some sort of mechanism to fill in what he means by 'dictates'. We would want to know what causes the repetition. However, in the context, this seems an unpersuasive reading. LeRoy Ladurie is attempting to describe the *philosophy* or *mentalité* of Montaillou as it manifests in Pierre Maury. It is therefore at least worth considering that here the zodiac itself is an internal feature of such a philosophy. There may not be enough of a gap between the zodiac and the behaviour it 'will dictate' for an explanatory mechanism (even one which is only loosely causal) to be interposed.

Just as above we saw Allert describe the intimate gift-meaning of greetings, and the divisiveness of the Nazi salute as an all-too-public oath where the practice of greeting had been shattered, the zodiac is a way of meeting the future. It is, however, a fatalistic one, and in this respect it might be treated as a way to meet the future by ignoring it. Perhaps this explains Maury's dogmatism: there are things he does not want to think about. As Rochberg suggests for ancient divination practices, '[f]oresight and fatalism do not sit well together'.<sup>437</sup> The reason is that foresight and (perhaps) foreknowledge give one the advantage of anticipation: a known future can, perhaps, be changed. On the contrary, fatalism is a form of ignorant, humble, or even *pious* resignation. This is

---

<sup>437</sup> Rochberg 2017: 161



the taboo broken by the Baconian William (see II). Rochberg recounts a passage from an Assyrian ‘diviner’s handbook’ revealing the magical steps which were then (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) considered possible to avert an evil portended through omens:

Their gods knew the future, but the nature of divine foreknowledge was of a different order from that of the later Christian God, about whose foreknowledge and predetermination of all things medieval theologians and scholastics attempted to reconcile with the question of free will[...] The Assyrians lived in a world of future contingencies [...].<sup>438</sup>

Pierre Maury, as we have seen, explicitly rejects the reading of omens – auguries in the flights of birds – as the pastime of old women. His own expression of a sense of ‘destiny’ is therefore in one respect a less scholarly mirror of Rochberg’s analysis of the difference between the ancient and the medieval. LeRoy Ladurie recounts another peasant’s report that ‘*when I had been made prisoner (by the Inquisition), I said [...] – what will be will be [...] it will be what God wants*’.<sup>439</sup> However, Rochberg’s analysis is superficial in so far as it fails to account for the future-oriented purpose involved in medieval fatalism. She describes only the system of thought and only thinly the world into which it fits. She may, indeed, fall into the same trap of over-intellectualism which one scholar suggests has been the run of the mill in studies of medieval heresy.<sup>440</sup> Treating the zodiac as an internal feature of Maury’s “philosophy” does not necessarily mean treating it as a fully conscious *belief*. His statements of destiny are only attempts to indicate his life-situation, and he struggles to articulate what obviously he has a more diffuse and deep-running sense of.

---

<sup>438</sup> Rochberg 2017: 161

<sup>439</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 449

<sup>440</sup> Pegg 2001, discussed below.

Maury's is a system of thought which from the outside can be seen to have exactly the same function of dealing with 'future contingencies' as Assyrian divination. In both, certain knowledge of the future is missing, and both the King of Assyria (for whom the more famous diviners would have worked) and the grand shepherd of Montaignou need a way to cope with this uncertainty. However, their wildly different lives make different sorts of certainty reassuring. The King of Assyria, one presumes, was concerned with matters of state – both his own, potentially vulnerable position on the throne and the position of Assyria itself with respect to what Rochberg's sources suggests might have been the three main threats of immediate concern: enemies, disease, and famine.<sup>441</sup> Later Rochberg discusses a collection of omens concerning two Babylonian kings, the *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Various passages seem to confirm that omens were used at these points of greatest anxiety: internecine conflict over the throne ('brother will smite brother'), proto-international affairs ('the king of Subartu will make peace with the lands'), and health ('plague will destroy the herds').<sup>442</sup>

On the contrary, as interested as he would be in the herds, Maury is not committed to a state or an office and its affairs; he is an unencumbered individual with 'neither hearth nor place'.<sup>443</sup> It is in fact LeRoy Ladurie who says that 'the zodiac will dictate its law'. *LeRoy Ladurie* makes this judgement about the (relative) future, drawing on something like 'foresight'. One might object that he knows about the "future" because he is armed with hindsight, not foresight, and this lets him see that the practice continues until the Renaissance a hundred or so years later; again, this may mean that he is simply positing the zodiac as a cause, or more generally as a means, which will continue until it is

---

<sup>441</sup> Untitled Assyrian text quoted by Rochberg 2017: 161

<sup>442</sup> *Enūma Anu Enlil*, 33 §IV.8, and an unnamed text; quoted by Rochberg 2017: 164-5.

<sup>443</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 193; LeRoy Ladurie's emphasis on this aspect of Maury is what contributes to some reader's sense of his having romanticized life in Montaignou; yet, this interpretation is only partially valid, given the repeated presence of the Inquisition and the predations of the house of Clergue; see Pegg 2001: 189<sup>n.18</sup>.

superseded. Such a reading is not ruled-out; but it does not do justice to LeRoy Ladurie's *first* fixing a fairly extended time-period ('here before the Renaissance [*dès avant la Renaissance*]', indicating that what follows the semicolon concerns this time-period, and *only afterwards* alluding to the future. The indexical *dès* might not be there; *avant la Renaissance* could stand unqualified. That LeRoy Ladurie should include it fixes not only the time of events but also the perspective of the reader on them.

The future usage and power of the zodiac in the *montalionalis* world is thus internal to the period/perspective LeRoy Ladurie defines. The future tense describes the extension of this period according to what is conceivable from its point of view. His judgement might therefore be seen as restricting the plausible (Hawthorn) or adjacent or reachable (Elster) possibilities characteristic of the *montalionalis* world. Seen like this, it is a world of specific 'future contingencies' where only so much can be *concretely* imagined as changing. So, while LeRoy Ladurie represents this world from the outside, *what* he attempts to represent is, if this passage is a clue with enough weight, the historically specific set of possibilities which, while it does not constitute a specific internal point of view, nonetheless configures the various internal points of view it would be possible, plausibly (in Hawthorn's sense), to have.<sup>444</sup>

*This* is what, finally, I mean by suggesting that *Montaillou* is a history of possibilities: Pierre Maury's fatalistic sense of destiny, manifested in speech-acts, is to be explained by fitting into a world of restricted, characteristic possibilities. It contributes to this world as a condition of it, among other conditions, in the way I analysed in IV (and which I shall return to below). This is not, in this case, because Maury's speech-acts have clear meanings which reveal their role as conditions. Rather, their underside, below their enigmatic surface, leads us into considering what they *could* mean in the world LeRoy Ladurie describes in so many other ways in *Montaillou*. This

---

<sup>444</sup> Cf. Ankersmit 2001: 216

“intermediate” consideration of possibilities, as in Hawthorn’s discussion of the *Maestà* (but not the plague) is where I suggest our historical inquiries can rest. As Rochberg suggests, LeRoy Ladurie’s foretelling the future requires abandoning fatalism. This perspective is unavailable to Pierre Maury if his fatalism is ‘overdetermined’. So, although he may be subject to the future in the way LeRoy Ladurie foretells, and while his own consciousness of this is expressed in dogmatic statements that appear in the first instance like *decisions* (he is offered other options, remember), there is a *blind* fatality expressed in the fact that it is personal, unexplained dogma he is forced to offer in place of an explanation. As I suggested above, it is here we reach the limits of a man and the limits of *Montaillou*. It is the very obscurity of Maury’s statements about his destiny which makes them useful spurs to my interpretation. Their lack of content – their lack of a clear meaning – forces us to look to how they fit into the rest of the text, and by beginning to do this I have been able to suggest that they show us that what is interesting is the historically specific world of possibilities they allow us to approach.

## *ii. Sides, wholes, conditions, and coordinates*

How does LeRoy Ladurie’s judgement of the future role of the zodiac and his representation of Maury’s statements of destiny compare to the judgements of: Adso, who in approaching the Abbey in *The Name of the Rose* is so impressed by its harmonious architecture; Redfield, who undermines the new-arrival’s sense of order, but nonetheless interprets *Little* communities through systems; or Brother William, whose own approach to the Abbey is through a vivid sense of singular possibilities, based on an appreciation for the corrupt diversity of its aspects – a scepticism about the Abbey’s orderliness equal to Redfield’s insistence on the visible? Does *Montaillou* have sides, does it make a whole? – as I kept asking, without too much explanation, in II. Here we can give further sense to these questions by answering them.

As aspects of Pierre Maury's *mentalité*, his fatalistic dogmas and the governing of his future through the zodiac are highly contrasting. His statements of destiny are proven elements of his conscious relationship with his world, however vague these statements are and however much they require interpretation from their underside. LeRoy Ladurie never shows that the zodiac is a conscious part of Maury's mental architecture; rather, it is a more general way to summarize the fatalistic relationship of his community to time and, more specifically, the future. The chapters on *Outillage mental: le temps et l'espace* (XVIII) and *Le sentiment de la nature et du destin* (XIX) go beyond Maury into the world of Montaillou. Everything about LeRoy Ladurie's description of the sense of time to be found in medieval Montaillou indicates that people had their noses to the ground they were working, thinking only in terms of *a little moment, a short pause, a big pause* or the time it took to travel a certain distance: *a league* or *a quarter of a league*.<sup>445</sup>

The measurement of time by the church bells, the symbol in sound of a unified Christendom (and therefore implicitly of victory over heresy), is said to impinge on the fields and mountain-tracks only partially.<sup>446</sup> Mass, to which the bells called, had – as we shall see – a highly ambiguous place in Montaillou, somewhat irrespective of any sense of Churchly order. That it would have been conducted by the Janus-faced rapist-priest Pierre Clergue, as part of his ambiguous personal dominium over Montaillou, is signal enough of this disordering. With time set mainly by the smaller tasks of work and travel, and no grander Roman sense of human purpose or planning, noses were – as I have put it – to the ground. Maury sticks to the mountain-tracks and his herd, and part of the reason (suggested by LeRoy Ladurie, at any rate) he continues despite the threat of the Inquisition is that it appeared to him as an external impact from a universe

---

<sup>445</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 419

<sup>446</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 419: 'la temporalité des humbles n'a été que partiellement accaparée par l'Église'.

beyond his purview. He controls what he can see. With his head down working hard, this may not have been very much. LeRoy Ladurie's discussion of time (XVIII) and destiny (XIX) shows that while Maury's fatalism is quite particular, he represents an interesting variation on relatively constant themes. Hegel, then, whose comments on Diogenes I discussed above (in part II), would talk of a singular social condition from which multiple personalities can develop. The zodiac is just one way for LeRoy Ladurie to specify such a condition, which functions rather like a theme of persons. But this is unsatisfactorily metaphorical as a description of Maury's place in the world. We can do better.

The zodiac is, in one sense, "external" to Maury in so far as he is never shown to express himself in its terms; but this sense of "external" need not be central to our interpretation. Like the divinely geometrical architecture of Adso's vision of the abbey, the zodiac seems like a ready-made interpretation. Redfield suggests that an Adso might leave it at that and write a very clear, but very *thin* book. The zodiac is, in one sense, simply a fact about Maury's world. Given that Maury himself is a part of this world, the zodiac might, in another sense, be treated as "internal" to Maury. Phenomenological writers might wish to say that the zodiac is "internal" to Maury's experience without being internal, in thoughts or words, to his conscious psychology.<sup>447</sup> Yet, even if this is true, it is not at all clear that Maury's *experience*, or even Maury himself, is LeRoy Ladurie's main concern. And saying that the zodiac is "an internal feature of Maury's experience" would tell us nothing about the contribution it makes there, either to Maury's experience or to the book we are reading. Our sense of his fatalism is not forced upon our interpretation through LeRoy Ladurie's descriptions of the more general role of the zodiac, however promising the zodiac is in virtue of its seeming like a *system*.

---

<sup>447</sup> See Ricoeur 1983, Merleau-Ponty 1964 and Schütz 1967 [1932].

The vagueness of Maury's enigmatical statements of destiny is what alerts us to the need for a wider-ranging interpretation to get even the slightest grip on their significance. The zodiac has some systematic qualities and a veneer of "meaning": as mysterious as it is from our point of view, it has parts with articulated relationships between them. However, this does not mean that, as an element in LeRoy Ladurie's representation of Montaillou, it escapes the need for *exactly the same* sort of interpretation as with Maury's opaque speech-acts. The resources for this are given in the rest of the text, and part of the virtue of Ankersmit's is that he does justice to the equality of a text's elements in so far as they function as *coordinates* or *conditions* of the world of possibilities I have suggested we are interested, finally, in grasping (see IV). However, neither of them has been able to articulate the essential concomitant thought, as I have tried to, that these coordinates, while equal *as* coordinates, introduce radically different ranges of possibilities, or exercise very different modifications of the ranges introduced by other factors.

We will extend our interpretation of *Montaillou* in a moment; but first let us mark a more general conclusion: we cannot approach things like the zodiac in *Montaillou* like Adso approaches the Abbey, overawed by its symmetry and systematic qualities. In this respect, we cannot treat either a community like Montaillou or the book *Montaillou* as having clear sides, and there is only a very evasive sense in which either of them forms a whole. Their elements are simply *together* as coordinates or conditions; but even if in this loose sense they can be said to form a complex, the significance of this complex is a rather open, textured, and diverse world of possibilities. Adso is naïve in reading the architecture directly onto the community it houses. Judgements about systems in Redfield's sense rely on and express judgements of possibilities in exactly the same *particular* way as Brother William's "intermediate" judgements of merely possible events and actions – albeit the actions of a horse. The *content* of judgements using

system-concepts may be more ambitious and wider-ranging than statements of singular facts supported by specific evidence, such as the fact that Maury said *I must carry my own destiny*, that Pierre Clergue raped Grazide Rives, or that a horse passed this way. However, the possibilistic nature of the judgement involved in placing these elements on the page is the same. Sequences, maps, directions, contracts (Redfield), social-mobility, kinship, kingdoms (Elster), and the zodiac, *ostal/domus* and *cabanes*, and other systematic elements of *Montaillou* have this in common with LeRoy Ladurie's reporting what Grazide Rives said Pierre Clergue did or what Pierre Maury said about himself. Ankersmit, Elster, Stinchcombe, and Hawthorn let us hint, in their different ways, that something like this holds; but let me show how my reworking of Ruben lets us say *how*.

## 24. The Priest's Dominion

### *i. The Rape of Grazide Rives*

Pierre Maury's illustrative significance in *Montaillou* far outstrips what seems to have been his personal power. Where he led, his sheep followed, but not too many others besides.<sup>448</sup> He may have had a certain pull, via these sheep (which despite his itinerant lifestyle constituted a significant financial resource), and certainly LeRoy Ladurie gives him a degree of independence, but he was not an established local power. Pierre Clergue, Catholic priest and Cathar conspirator, was certainly that. As we described in II, this Pierre was the dominant male in the Montaillou's dominant household, above his brothers Bernard (the bailiff) and Raymond.<sup>449</sup> He was, as we have also seen, a rapist.

---

<sup>448</sup> Cf. John 10:27

<sup>449</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 94f



His raping the fourteen or fifteen year-old Grazide Rives became so regular as to become quasi-institutionalized. Her husband accepted it. Her mother's protests were soon silenced.<sup>450</sup> Such abuse is not only morally serious in so far as we probably wish to condemn the individual acts which constituted it; the abuse also shows us something more generally horrifying about the vulnerable situation of people like Grazide Rives and her mother Fabrisse. They were dominated by loyalty to the *domus* and the dominance of the male Clergues this enabled. We may, in fact, be horrified *despite* the testimony of Grazide Rives. We find later that Grazide seems to have derived some pleasure from Pierre Clergue's visits, and the rape sits at the beginning of a strange chain of actions where what would count as an appropriate response to them, or even how one should describe the overall situation, is highly unclear.

What is involved in interpreting the significance of this single action in the broader world of *domūs*, heresy, medieval Christianity and stock-raising represented in *Montaillou*? The model I constructed in IV shows us how to begin with an action; but here, finally, we will put the pieces together and show how more sociological elements (which in III I suggested could also be interested in terms of possibilities) fit into this picture. At the end of my analysis of action, I arrived at an adjusted version of Ruben's Cambridge theory, the *Burnley* theory. Although it is in some ways more complex, it has the advantage of eschewing any reference to a strange, Cambridge sort of action. I did not simply reject Ruben's account, but the Burnley theory is certainly a radical remodelling. The diagram I used to summarize it makes clear the role of possibilities in action-causal chains (chains of actions linked into a wider causal world of events). Let me offer it again in a slightly more determinate form:

---

<sup>450</sup> See LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227f and II above.

$$\begin{array}{c}
A^1_r \ / \ C < [A^2_p \dots A^x_p] \\
| \quad \quad | \quad \quad | \quad \quad | \\
(e^a) \rightarrow e^b < [(e^c_p) \dots (e^x_p)]
\end{array}$$

Recall that I used this to represent what happens when a real action *A* and its intrinsic event (*e*) seems to be elaborated by its causal effects: (*e*) causes an event *e*. Ruben wants to say that this results in a wholly new *action* – a Cambridge action. However, I argued that while Ruben is correct to doubt that things like delayed killings involve mere descriptions, nonetheless his conception of Cambridge actions should be rejected. They seem like contrived theoretical entities conjured up to solve a puzzle which Ruben cannot really solve: the puzzle of posthumous, or post-*action* predication. Instead, as the diagram shows, we ought to understand the role played by (putative) Cambridge actions as being fulfilled by a *condition*, *C*. The identity of this condition is fixed by the future; but the future, from the point of view of the agent's action, is not itself fixed. The condition is therefore determined by a range of possibilities. In this final version of the diagram, I have indicated possible actions and their intrinsic events with the subscript *p*, simply for 'possible', rather than the grey symbols I used above in IV (which were more impressionistic than indicative). Can this model tell us anything about the progression and purpose of the short tale of the rape of Graziade Rives? It does not fit perfectly, but we have been discussing the model in rather basic terms. Confronting it with a real case from history reveals that it can be extended in two further ways to account for: (1) a case involving a *social* relationship and not just the action of an individual; (2) the sociological concepts we need to add to the interpretation of this relationship to describe its historical condition.

The basic action of the rape of Grazide Rives is wrapped, in *Montaillou*, into what Geertz would call a ‘thick description’, but with some unexpected elements.<sup>451</sup> Firstly, LeRoy Ladurie tells us that Clergue has, through various means, slept his way around half the village: Béatrice de Planissoles, Gaillarde Benet, and her sister Alissende Roussel are all named before Grazide. ‘The local civilization is tolerant of the sexuality of the cleric’, writes LeRoy Ladurie.<sup>452</sup> The testimony of Grazide Rives herself sets more of the scene, recounting that the first time Clergue came she was a virgin and that she was fourteen or fifteen.<sup>453</sup> The act of rape itself is described perfunctorily: *he had me in the barn where we keep the straw*.<sup>454</sup> It is, so to speak, what became of this rape that becomes the subject. What a rape can possibly be shows us a corner of the world of Montaillou *as* a world of distinctive possibilities. Clergue is able to return, with the apparent but (as we saw in II) begrudging consent of her mother; Grazide then marries and the abuse – or is it abuse? – continues with the husband’s consent.

In giving this testimony, Grazide is speaking purely about the past, but later LeRoy Ladurie quotes from her present speech to Jacques Fournier, the Inquisitor:

She retrieves, in speaking of this adventure which pleased [her lover] and which she considered as *innocent*, the tone of *Breviaire d’amour* [...] <sup>455</sup>: “A women who sleeps with someone who is really in love with her is purified of all sins... the joy of love makes innocent the act, because it comes from a pure heart”. And Grazide added: *With Pierre Clergue*, she says, *it pleased me. So it cannot have displeased God. It wasn’t a sin*. Grazide had not read the poets; but, like them, she drew her intuitions from the common foundation of Occitan culture[.] <sup>456</sup>

---

<sup>451</sup> See Geertz 1973: chp.1.

<sup>452</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 225

<sup>453</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227

<sup>454</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 227

<sup>455</sup> An Occitan poem justifying eroticism in sight of God.

<sup>456</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 228

Startlingly, we are a long way from the initial rape; and one has to admit it is now a little disturbing to read LeRoy Ladurie's account, which begins with Clergue's rapacity, but ending in a lament about the 'simple pleasures of old times' with no further qualification.<sup>457</sup> LeRoy Ladurie would be really pushing his luck were it not for the testimony of Grazide herself, and even with it the idea that her experience reveals 'simple pleasures' seems flatly wrong. Her pleasures are in fact, from a historical point of view, rather complex.<sup>458</sup>

The sequence of events which follows the initial rape of Grazide seems to alter the character of the act. As with Pierre Maury's fatalism, LeRoy Ladurie notes the influence of a 'common foundation of Occitan culture', and in this respect the combined actions of Grazide Rives and Pierre Clergue are treated as something to explain with reference to an antecedent: the stock of Occitan culture which includes poetry exhorting the divinity of romantic eroticism. As with Maury's fatalism, LeRoy Ladurie describes Pierre Clergue's licentiousness as 'overdetermined [*surdéterminé*]'.<sup>459</sup> However, again like the fatalism expressed by Maury – which may plausibly have been one of the attitudes enabling Grazide to take pleasure in unfree sex – there is no separate "zodiac" or system to be found in the poems whose attitudes she seems to have expressed. If her world is suffused with troubadour-romanticism, as LeRoy Ladurie suggests (to the extent, remember, that she would not need to be able to read to imbibe it), it is partly her own actions which demonstrate and instantiate this. So, is the rape and subsequent (retrospective?) seduction of Grazide by Pierre Clergue simply an *example* of something more general in *Montaillou*, perhaps in a 'trenchant socio-economic analysis' (*pace*

---

<sup>457</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 229: 'des charmes discrets [*discreet*] de l'ancien temps' – but I have put 'simple', which is both more idiomatic in English and captures LeRoy Ladurie's earlier exclamation: '*Sancta simplicitas!*', *ibid.* His pleasure in the absence of St. Augustine's more repressive attitudes is not entirely convincing in this context – not least because the later Church may not have done much better.

<sup>458</sup> Cf. Hegel 1991 [1821]: 231 (§195).

<sup>459</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226

Weis) which leaves the individual person behind and beneath? This was the accusation levied in various terms by Carrard, Burke, and Weis, as we saw in II; but the model from IV gives us a detailed alternative.

The basic action and its intrinsic event is the initial rape committed by Pierre Clergue.

$A^1_r$

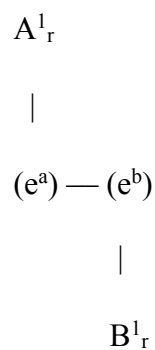
|

$(e^a)$

What comes next is a sequence of actions and events as complex as the journey taken by the Queen to Balmoral in Ruben's example in IV. We do not know how many visits it took before Grazide accepted her position enough to enjoy sex with Pierre Clergue – for rape to be transformed into seduction. So, in this historical case, as opposed to the concocted example of shooting the Queen, there is no single causal relationship between the basic intrinsic event  $e^a$  and one of its directly causal consequences as we took to exist between the shooting and the dying of the Queen. Ruben located the strange logical space above the causal consequent  $e^b$ . We rejected his suggestion that this is to be filled with a second action of a second and special kind. Instead, the model treats this logical space as being filled by a *condition* ( $C$ ). Above, we treated a condition abstractly, but dealing with *Montaillou* requires we illustrate what a condition can be more fully. The difference in the historical case is that it relies on Grazide Rives' action as well as Pierre Clergue's; and it requires that Grazide's action is a *response* to Clergue's raping her. So, we need a way to model this initial sequence of actions and

events as what Weber calls ‘social action’: action which is responsive to the actions of others *qua* meaningful action.<sup>460</sup>

Luckily, the model above is flexible, and it is possible to model social action in a simplified way:



Any A is an action of Pierre Clergue – here, a rape. A B is an action of Grazielle Rives. Quite which of Rives’ undocumented actions need to be thought of as represented here is unclear, and it might be best not to get into it. However, what this diagram shows is the simplest form of social action: an action of A is followed by an action of B. Each has intrinsic events, but unlike the model above, the relationship between these events is not causal. Instead, the only, and indeed the most basic link between them is that the second is a response to the first (put aside questions about what makes a response sufficiently *social*). I have represented this relation of responsiveness with a horizontal line, replacing the horizontal arrow representing causation in the fundamental model developed in IV. So far, this is just a very simple model of social action, but it is

---

<sup>460</sup> Weber 2013 [1922]: 22-4

conducive for adding the conditional and possibilistic elements which I have argued we should be interested in.

What happens, or what *has* happened, once Graziade Rives responds in the relevant way? We face a puzzle of post-coital predication. It is only after Graziade responds in a particular way to being raped that Pierre Clergue can claim to have seduced her. Ruben would claim that Clergue has committed two actions, a rape (real action) and a seduction (Cambridge action). The austere theorist would claim that these are simply terms used in two descriptions. However, I suggested that we ought instead to see a *condition* in place of the putative second action, rather than any sort of action or a description of an action. Above, this made sense of an agent's relationship to their action in the light of its causal consequences. Here it will make sense of the agent's action in the light of another agent's response. What constitutes the new condition, I suggested, is a relationship with multiple future possibilities which form a vector corresponding to the condition:  $C < [A^2_p \dots A^x_p]$ . The condition they share can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

$$\begin{array}{cccc}
 A^1_r & / & C < & [A^2_p \dots A^x_p] \\
 | & & | & & | & & | \\
 (e^a) & \text{---} & (e^b) & < & [(e^c_p) \dots (e^x_p) \dots (e^y_p)] \\
 & & | & & | & & | & & | \\
 B^1_r & / & C < & [B^2_p \dots B^y_p]
 \end{array}$$

So, in this case, Pierre Clergue's raping Grazide Rives and her (perhaps surprisingly) favourable response alters what it is plausible for each agent to do *next*.<sup>461</sup> The condition *C* is *one condition*, and that it appears in more than one place expresses both its temporal extension and the fact that this is social action: it takes two to tango. Identifying this condition is a job for the historian and sociologist, and the condition itself is historically specific. A similar instance of social action in most corners of modern Britain, with a middle-aged man raping a fourteen year-old, would make the man's social life very difficult to say the least; likely incarceration would make their physical possibilities for action very limited. It may even be true that the transition from rape to seduction, and the relevant response, would be *impossible* in quite the same way, given that modern Britain has no active tradition of troubadour-romanticism for a Grazide to be influenced by.

Perhaps a more direct comparison with Grazide's Montaignou can be found in Baroque Germany and its religious expressions of sexual anxiety. There, on Roper's account, the male seducer appears as the Devil come to exploit despairing women.<sup>462</sup> That a woman might take pleasure in the way Grazide seems to is both fretfully ruled-out and dwelt-upon with fascinated disgust. This is demonstrated in a remarkable woodcut from

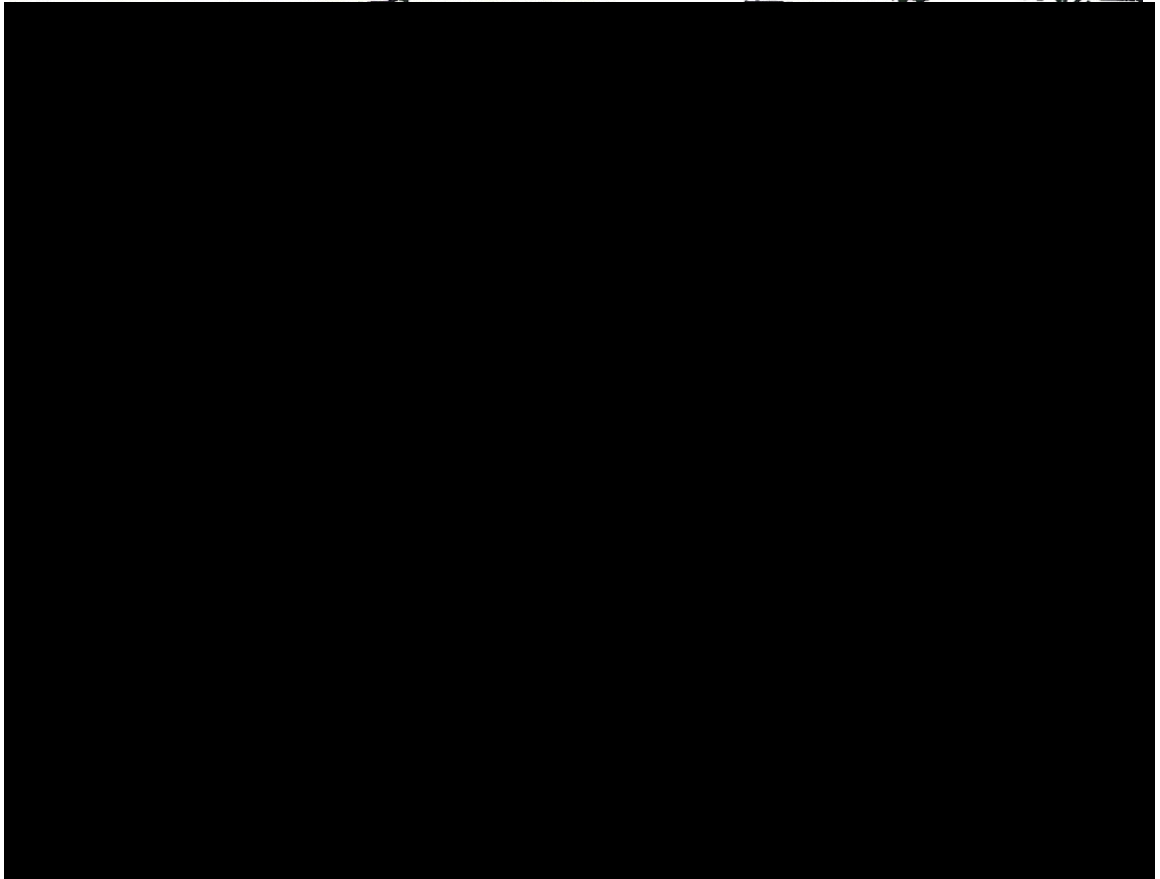
---

<sup>461</sup> Recall that on this picture the by-relation /, discussed above, simply links a real action into a set of circumstances to form a condition for a range of possibilities.

<sup>462</sup> Roper 2006: 92. Note that Weis thus rather anachronistically refers to Pierre Clergue as 'the demon priest' in *The Yellow Cross*; 2000: 41ff.



the *Compendium maleficarum* of 1626 showing a witch ‘giving the anal kiss’ to a smug looking Satan. A demonstration more vivid, perhaps, than any description (*figure 7*).<sup>463</sup>



*Figure 7*

While the assembled crowd is tooled for a lynching, their hands reaching out in protest, they seem to have paused, and all their eyes are fixed excitedly on the evasive point of contact. It is, perhaps, fear of such religiously wrought anxieties in a later age that vitiates LeRoy Ladurie’s sense of ‘simple pleasures’. All things, it would seem, are relative – not least the incest which is one of the clues linking sex to the system of

---

<sup>463</sup> Roper 2006: 92; reproduces Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium malificarum*, Milan 1626.

households in Montaillou (see below).<sup>464</sup> Where rapes might be allowed to pass in these other cultures and times, they would not pass in the same way as in medieval Montaillou. And yet, even there they would not determine any single future possibility or any one set of future possibilities; they would only be the basis for a vector of historical possibilities specific to modern Britain or Baroque Germany. In the world of *Montaillou*, however, the rape/seduction of Grazide only consolidates Pierre Clergue's dominance. It threatens her mother, Fabrisse Rives, into silence and her husband, Pierre Lizier, is confirmed in his intermale subordination via a hierarchical relation to an object – Grazide – shared with his superior.<sup>465</sup> These too involve *responses* in social action.

Although the responses of Pierre Lizier and Fabrisse Rives are *equal* contributions as coordinates in LeRoy Ladurie's varied text (*pace* Ankersmit), they do not carry the same weight of interest as the rape of Grazide. Instead, they indicate connections between the initial rape and the world in which it is possible for the rape to become a seduction. The seduction, however, is not a transformation of the rape into a new action or simply the same action newly described. Rather, the seduction is a change of *condition* which cannot simply be identified with any single action. Here we are dealing with a social action, so it is a change of condition for at least Pierre Clergue and Grazide Rives. It is also a change of condition for any others who might *respond* to the seduction; and in this respect a change of condition is a change in the possible actions of possible people. As a specific condition, it is fixed by the vector of actions (and related events) which might, plausibly, follow it. To identify such a condition is to make judgements about the possibilities forming the content of this vector. We can make singular judgements about possibilities, as with Brother William and Brunellus; or

---

<sup>464</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226, and see below.

<sup>465</sup> Elsewhere, Clergue's behaviour is even more presumptuous: he does not even bother to see if 'a poor devil like Benet' is out before he sleeps with his wife; LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226.

we can make more general judgements using concepts which seem more system-like, as with Redfield; but I have suggested that in both cases our historical judgements of possibilities are particular. Employing a system concept is much the same sort of judgement, though one with a wider scope, as Brother William's reflections on singular clues.

What we shall need to see, then, finally, is how sociological concepts in *Montaillou* can be treated as functioning within possibilistic judgements. The dominion of Pierre Clergue was a web spun through the *domus*, his position confirmed in church – in the *mass*. So we will need to see how these broader features of life in Montaillou contribute to our sense of its possibilities. His seduction of Grazide is not in any obvious way *caused* by his power; but the possible future responses of Grazide, Pierre Lizier, Fabrisse, and others, as well as himself (all of which indicate how the initial rape can contribute to a seduction) must themselves be understood in terms of their condition – in terms, that is, of the possible actions which might plausibly follow them. First, however, let us mark a conclusion about the place of individual actions in history as I have construed it, like the rape of Grazide and – more elusively – the enigmatical statements of Pierre Maury's destiny:

In the commentary I have given, the basic action of rape is soon taken up in a broader web of events, responses, and possibilities. While it carries a certain weight in the text – a greater weight, for instance, than the responses of Grazide's husband and mother – nonetheless it too is treated as a contribution to a historical condition. This, in a sense, *explains* it, and it is our grasp of this condition (which I have construed in much the same way as Hawthorne) which constitutes our *understanding* it. But this form of possibilistic explanation is unusual: the rape features as both antecedent *and* explanandum (the thing to be explained).<sup>466</sup> It is not deduced from a set of prior

---

<sup>466</sup> See IV above.

conditions. Rather, it is explained by showing how it contributes *as* a condition of future possibilities, in combination with other events and responses. This means running forwards in a possibilistic picture where previously we might have expected to run backwards in a causal one. An action is explained by fitting it into *a history of possibilities*.

*ii. Mass, domus, chateau and cabanes*

That Pierre Clergue should be a ‘seducer’, LeRoy Ladurie says, ‘is overdetermined’.<sup>467</sup> This recalls his thought that Pierre Maury’s fatalism was overdetermined through his having been surrounded by fatalistic cultures. I suggested that this need not mean simply that these cultures are antecedents to Maury’s fatalism, though I do not deny that they indicate aspects of his history. Rather, LeRoy Ladurie’s judgements of overdetermination are of the future possibilities facing Pierre Clergue and Pierre Maury. The claim of overdetermination, which usually implies multiple *causes*, is for LeRoy Ladurie a matter of multiple, overlapping *influences*. The actions of Pierre Clergue and Pierre Maury show us the continuation of these traditions of influence. For Maury, it is the fatalism illustrated by the zodiac (see above). For Clergue, LeRoy Ladurie draws a connection between his multiple seductions, through variably coercive means (as we have seen), and the “system” of *domūs/ostals* uniting biological family, cultural continuity, economic base, and physical housing:

To chase women [*courir les femmes*] is also, from his point of view, to stay faithful to the ideology of the *domus*, which he held so close to his heart. *I am a priest, I don’t want a wife* (and, it is to be understood, I want all the women), he said one day to Béatrice [de Planissoles]. In saying that, in affirming and implying his double qualities

---

<sup>467</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226

of priest and Don Juan, Pierre undermines – in the ideal, for sure – the marital process by which his brothers (and sister) had impoverished their father’s house: they married outsiders; they hadn’t let one among them marry their sister; they had let her dowry slip away. The life of “celibacy” he choose, over and above his sexual adventures, made him the best son in the world and the true saviour of the family *domus*. At the same time, a nostalgia for rural incest, as the unique and inaccessible medium for not dispersing the wealth of the *ostal* [= *domus*], stayed anchored in the heart of this priest; he mentions, deploring it, the ban on sleeping with one’s sister and mother[.]<sup>468</sup>

In this account, there is a firm economic rationale to Pierre Clergue’s predations, real and fantastic. Yet, the picture is not one of straightforward economic determinism. His attachment to the *domus* is ostensibly as much of a motive as personal greed, and it would take an extra step of interpretation to establish that even this attachment springs from purely economic motives. LeRoy Ladurie also suggests an *indirect* relationship between the ‘ideology’ of the *domus* and Clergue’s having lots of sex: he disagrees with the rules because they undermine the *domus*, so he breaks them. The conclusion of LeRoy Ladurie’s account of Clergue’s sexual ideology is unequivocal: ‘*Domus* and donjuanism are mutually confirming, in his case’.<sup>469</sup>

The outline of how to fit a concept like *domus* into my model ought now to be fairly clear: in III, I suggested that Elster’s possibilistic accounts of social mobility, kinship systems, and kingdoms could be extended towards an account (which I found partially in Stinchcombe) where sociological concepts are *constituted* by possibilities, and that when they are used to make claims (how else can they be used?), they thus necessarily imply claims *about* possibilities. With Hawthorn, I extended this suggestion more generally to the historical interpretations – such as his of the *Maestà* – within which such sociological concepts and other historical categories like *realism* will feature. In

---

<sup>468</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226

<sup>469</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 226: ‘*Domus* et donjuanisme s’affirment dans son cas complémentaires’.

such an account, a concept like *domus*, or *cabanes* (the more or less temporary mountain shelters built by shepherds like Pierre Maury) is in one respect easy to fit into the model of actions I have developed. If they always make claims about possibilities, then *ipso facto* they make claims about the vectors of possible actions or events represented by  $[A^2_p \dots A^x_p]$  or  $[(e^c_p) \dots (e^x_p)]$ . These ranges of possibilities characterize the conditions (C) of action.

*Domus* is almost impossible to define or analyse fully; but we already understand from LeRoy Ladurie that it indicates a range<sup>470</sup> of claims about how people will act socially (in families, with “cultural” references to the past mediating their unity), the ways in which they will sustain themselves (transhumant shepherding, taxes, weaving, stock, cash and food crops), and the basic physical condition of shelter, meeting, and the predictability of individuals’ locations (the stone houses themselves). It would be foolish and probably wholly unrewarding to attempt to demonstrate such large, though not unrestricted *ranges* of possibilities in the diagrammatic form I have been using. It is unlikely that a realistic interpretation of a particular condition of action will be transacted purely in generalizing sociological concepts or, indeed, comparable historical categories. As we found in Hawthorn’s interpretation of the *Maestà*, a category like *realism* or a concept like *domus* must be woven into a thicker fabric of other concepts, details and accounts of their historical significance. LeRoy Ladurie indicates this himself by describing:

[the] thin line between *domus* and heresy; the pregnancy of the *domus* itself, with its possible *cortège* of annexed institutions (adoption of future son-in-law/heir [*gendre*], co-residence, dowry); the father of a family, who chooses a *gendre* as an adoptive son for the continuation of his lineage and of his *domus*, anticipated by an honest agreement that his daughter, still a girl, will give her virginity, along with a dowry, to

---

<sup>470</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 51-107

the young man already living with the family [*jeune adulte corésident*] whom he has chosen for his succession.<sup>471</sup>

The ‘possible *cortège*’ here specifies more of the possibilities in the range indicated by the concept *domus*. The adoption of an heir, the motivation of succession, the power of the father over the daughter, the continuation of the lineage, the agreement, her willingness, and the co-residence of the *gendre*, all indicate quite specific and – as we put it in II – straightforwardly understandable and *visible* actions or activities. But to use the concept *domus* is place them in the realm of the possible, to the right hand side of the *C* in my diagrams; each of them fills-in a  $P^x_p$  and, in however small a way, defines the present condition of whoever is considered the relevant agent or set of agents. So, while we cannot usefully represent the concept *domus* (or an instance of its use) diagrammatically, we can begin to specify the concept using some of the coordinates it indicates.

However simple it may be by later or more urban standards, the institutional resumé of Montaignou is not exhausted by the *domus*. For example, LeRoy Ladurie discusses the occasional *taverns*, more routinized elsewhere, which served the local area both as supply points for drinking and as sites of “sociability [*sociabilité*]”. There may not, of course, have been a strict separation between these factors, as the wonderful phrase ‘conversations de boire’ expresses.<sup>472</sup> In such a tavern, Guillaume Escaunier found a heretic religious to tend his mother on her deathbed, and generations since have found priests, conspirators, friends, fights, lovers or plumbers in much the same way.<sup>473</sup> The tavern has always been a place of possibility. ‘However’, LeRoy Ladurie writes, ‘the tavern is secondary’ in Montaignou:

---

<sup>471</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 121

<sup>472</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 400

<sup>473</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 400

The great occasion for sociability, bringing together the whole mass of villagers, coming from houses or herds, in a diastolic Sunday drawing-in, is the Mass. [...] The Mass, that is what is above all; shouted, spoken, in each parish (with one restriction: some villages did not have a church; they sent their faithful to the sanctuary of the closest village [*bourg*]).<sup>474</sup>

Montaillou did have a church, and the Mass was conducted by Pierre Clergue in his vicarious role as *curé* or priest. LeRoy Ladurie describes the Mass as vicarious too. The Mass is, ostensibly, a ritual. However, the significance of the Mass in *Montaillou* cannot be grasped through theories of ritual which treat rituals as processes whose internal flow – of information, emotion, or authority – is the object of the theory.

Lukes, for instance, discussed theories treating political rituals in contemporary societies as essentially fountains of propaganda for a particular structure of authority, where what is interesting is *how* the resources of conformism are transmitted within the ritual.<sup>475</sup> His own suggestion that the informational transfer in such rituals is instead through the medium of collective representations which, while conducive to the ‘mobilization of bias’, nonetheless leave room for disputation, is still focussed primarily on the internal functioning of the ritual *qua* complex event.<sup>476</sup> A similar “internalist” view of rituals is also to be found in Whitehouse’s more recent attempt to decipher rituals armed with evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology: cognitive mechanisms and the survival of information within the housing of the ritual are the *foci*. For an example, consider the ancient Greek temples staging the cult of a god in a shock of fire and night.<sup>477</sup> Even where Lukes suggests that rituals must be considered ‘*within* a class-

---

<sup>474</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 401. I distinguish between a large group (‘mass’) and the ceremony (‘Mass’). Despite the congruence – the Mass brings the mass together – there is in fact no shared derivation and the confusion does not arise in French (*masse* = mass/ *messe* = Mass); or Latin. The word ‘Mass’ comes from the Latin *missa*, connoting a message sent (as in ‘missive’) to God.

<sup>475</sup> Lukes 1975: 290-301

<sup>476</sup> Lukes 1975: 301-305

<sup>477</sup> Whitehouse 2004



structured, conflictual, and pluralistic model of society', the point of doing so is to get a good theory *of the ritual*.<sup>478</sup>

The problem with this “internalist” focus in an interpretation of the Mass in *Montaillou* is that here the ritual (as I have said in other terms about individual actions) serves merely as a crossroads in a broader societal map. The most important point, for LeRoy Ladurie, is that it brings large numbers of people together. The powerful if often subterranean influence of Catharism means that sometimes the Mass itself is considered an incidental ‘joke’ [*c’est de la truffe*] by those in attendance.<sup>479</sup> More seriously, while the Mass sometimes transmits elements of the liturgy, however imperfectly and heretically in content,<sup>480</sup> it is also a place where the real social infrastructure of unbelief and heresy is enabled to expand – simply because it encourages social contact. Where LeRoy Ladurie compares the *montalionsais* Mass to the *pueblos* to be found in some pastoral societies of South America, the point of the comparison is not to indicate a simple Durkheimian function where the solidarity of the tribe is reinforced.<sup>481</sup> Rather, it emphasizes an elementary aspect of such rituals: that they regularly bring people, physically, together. The relative weakness of the official Church in Montaillou – its representative Clergue is himself a heretic – means that its liturgical function is likely to have been substantially diluted, though this is not to say it was *absent*. Sometimes the liturgy made an impact, as it seems to have done with Gaillarde Cayra: ‘Our whole salvation is to be found in the Mass’, she is recorded by Jacques Fournier as having said.<sup>482</sup> The *Mass* might be an ideal and repeatable template from the point of view of the Roman Church; but in Montaillou it is the ritual container of whatever individuals

---

<sup>478</sup> Lukes 1975: 301, my emphasis.

<sup>479</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 402

<sup>480</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 402: see the account of Amiel de Rieux’s teaching on resurrection to his illiterate parishioners.

<sup>481</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 401

<sup>482</sup> *Notre salut tout entier consiste dans la messe*; LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 401

and social institutions surround it. It too has its 'possible *cortège* of annexed institutions'. The chateau is present through the regular 'or at least occasional' attendance of Béatrice de Planissoles, the châtelaine, who brings 'colourful candles' in offering to the Virgin Mother.<sup>483</sup> The *cabanes* is present through Pierre Maury and his offerings of woollen fleeces to St. Anthony. And the power of the *domus* of the Clergues looms over the vicarious Mass through its vicarious priest. All their possible actions, in the mountains, the castle, the stone houses; in Montailhou, in the Ariège, over the border in Catalonia or down in the towns in the valleys; in peace or in the flames of the Inquisition; they all run strained in the choices of belief and association through the Mass in *Montailhou* – the black-hole, so to speak, of LeRoy Ladurie's history of possibilities.

### *iii. Concluding remarks*

I have built a theory and used it to demonstrate a perspective. I have had to show you how to adopt this perspective at length in these final commentaries because my detailed theory is in danger of being overrun by the historical details of *Montailhou*. I have tried to guide the eye of the reader rather than set you rules. But the trouble with reading a history of possibilities is that one can always go on further. This is true of my commentaries on *Montailhou*. My concluding commentaries must stand their limited ground on their own feet. Yet, I have had to present my theory, too, in a limited way, not least because the opposite danger menaces: the detailed development of the theory could overrun the historical details of *Montailhou*. Further developments might take my theory to visit other issues in historical or sociological theory, but the cost of these visits

---

<sup>483</sup> LeRoy Ladurie 1975: 401

would have been leaving *Montaillou* behind.<sup>484</sup> The general idea of a history of possibilities stands in a relationship with *Montaillou* which is as ambiguous as Pierre Clergue with Grazide Rives, mutually threatening and mutually rewarding at (more or less) the same time.<sup>485</sup>

I have limited my discussion to an exposition of the main elements and connections in LeRoy Ladurie's picture – those which are most conducive for revealing the dimension of possibilities with which I have been concerned. In my reading, we look past singular events, factors, or individuals like Pierre Clergue and Pierre Maury to the possible paths through *Montaillou*/Montaillou which they mark. To compress *Montaillou* into these Russian dolls – Clergue/his character/his action/*domus*/mountain-village and Maury/his character/his action/*cabanes*/mountain-village – is not, therefore, to insist in a final way that they contain the most interesting details, or persons. As I noted above, I have had to marginalize a third Russian doll, though this is not because it contains a woman: Béatrice de Planissoles/her character/her action/*chateau*/village-mountain. However, working towards the limited claim that *Montaillou* is a history of possibilities justifies my reading's being, strictly, unrepresentative:

I have claimed with the support of Ankersmit that *all* the elements of *Montaillou* contribute to our sense of the world of possibilities it depicts. My selective reading therefore consists in exaggeration. Yet, part of the point of this interpretation is to open the world of possibilities to our imagination, where limited elements like the Mass,

---

<sup>484</sup> For example, further discussion might aim at construing concepts like *historical distance* or *network* in possibilistic terms, given that both *might* seem to make implicit reference to possibilities already: see Phillips 2013 on the former (who also employs commentaries in a theoretically expository way) and Demeulenaere 2011 on the latter.

<sup>485</sup> Perhaps the comparison does not quite hold if we struggle to see Grazide as a threat to Clergue; but we have already acknowledged Clergue's wariness of raping/seducing Grazide in the presence of her husband, and this is to acknowledge Grazide's attitude, were it to be unfavourable, as a potential threat to Clergue – even if this is in an indirect, social way. She is a threat in so far as she represents a danger. Perhaps this is what it means to recognize the “agency” of a historically subordinate category of person.

limited factors like the topography or the market forces linked Montaignou to the towns, or limited people like Pierre Maury and his circumscribed life, serve as gateways into a wider but still historically specific world of possibilities which is modified further by elements, factors, and people which – or whom – I have not found space to discuss. As Ankersmit puts it, '[e]verything will give us access to everything else, in the way that even the humblest of the Leibnizian monads is a mirror of the whole universe' – and I have tried to show that this actually means something faced with a text.<sup>486</sup>

However, as I argued in IV, the logical equality of elements in a work of history needs to be understood as grounding unequal contributions to the world of possibilities it depicts, otherwise Ankersmit's use of Leibniz remains mysterious. I have not been able to make full sense of Ankersmit's idea that statements or elements in a text are, as *monad*-like microcosms. His point as I have construed it is that the various elements of a work of history open out into its world of other elements. But the idea that one element will give us a kind of interpretative 'access' to the others seems incompatible with the idea that the element at hand already *contains* (as a microcosm must) the other features of its world. Instead, I suggested a way to keep such elements separate while allowing that they merge only in so far as the ranges of possibilities which they ground are mutually modifying. Licentious peasants are one thing, licentious peasants in steep mountains is quite another – combined, they ground different possibilities. On this possibilistic view, it is the joining together of elements as coordinates of an overall range of possibilities which both forms the somewhat open whole which *Montaignou* is and which constitutes the object of interest it presents to the reader. Leaving some things unsaid in my interpretation of *Montaignou*, even though my theory requires treating it as a detailed whole, is not, therefore, problematic. The way is left open for adding additional interpretations focussing on different elements which will weigh

---

<sup>486</sup> Ankersmit 2001: 216

differently in the book's overall range of possibilities. This 'openness' might suggest we describe *Montaillou* as a whole without sides, in answer to Brother Williams' question in *The Name of the Rose*.

The interpretation of a work of history like *Montaillou* may, therefore, be comparable to the interpretation of a culture. Ankersmit's idea that the elements of a work of history give us 'access' to the others is mirrored in Geertz' final reflections on the Balinese cockfight:

As in more familiar exercises in close reading, one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay, as I have here, within a single, more or less bounded form, and circle steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them.<sup>487</sup>

Geertz' 'forms' seem to be wholes without sides as well, given that they let one pass through them to more or less anywhere else. But Brother William might scold me as an Adso for indulging in mysteries at this point, instead of trying to solve them by seeing obvious possibilities. He would insist on sharpening the metaphor, because a whole without sides is a nonsense. And a lack of sides does not do justice to the way elements in a work of history, or in a society, give one *access* (as both Ankersmit and Geertz put it), but access to a world of possibilities with a detailed shape. If *Montaillou* can be seen as a whole it must have sides; but in my possibilistic picture these sides have doors. The metaphor of *whole*, then, and the system-concepts we encountered first with Redfield, can only be applied by judging the possibilities characteristic of the time and

---

<sup>487</sup> Geertz 1993 [1973]: 453

place. Regardless of scale, whether one is concerned with the aesthetics of the 1200s and 1300s like Hawthorn or a broader social or political situation like a kingdom or a distinctive kinship system, like Elster and Stinchcombe, making these judgements is essentially the same – just as shaky, just as prospective – as judgements of singular possible actions and events, like the escape of Brunellus.

The metaphor of sides and wholes, while it enables any number of slightly floppy subsidiary metaphors of doors, gateways, and ‘access’, might nevertheless mask what is important in the theory and interpretation I have offered: the openness to specific but *historical* possibilities. In the Introduction, I suggested that LeRoy Ladurie represents Montaillou as lying between two forms of village-community delineated by Marx. In one, the village is self-sustaining; in the other, it is an outpost of a city – Toulouse. Montaillou does not match either of these perfectly, and in chronological terms it comes too late for Marx’s concerns. However, in the following passage from the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes the historical transition between the two forms – with some help from Niebuhr:

[T]he tendency of this small warlike community drives it beyond these limits, etc. (Rome, Greece, Jews, etc.) As Niebuhr says: “When the auguries had assured Numa of the divine approval for his election, the first preoccupation of the pious monarch was not the worship of the gods, but a human one. He distributed the land conquered in war by Romulus and left it to be occupied: he founded the worship of Terminus (the god of boundary stones). All the ancient law-givers, and above all Moses founded the success of their arrangements for virtue, justice and good morals (*Sitte*) upon landed property, or at least on secure hereditary possession of land, for the greatest possible number of citizens. (Vol. I, 245, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Roman History*.)”<sup>488</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup> Marx 1964: 73-4

So here Marx is concerned with the succession of village forms, not ‘epochs’. I began by discussing Ranke and Hegel, explaining that their vision of a sort of history concerned with more than the facts, in a ‘divine order’ or a ‘succession of epochs’ (Ranke), or in the movement of ‘spirit’ through history (Hegel), is too mysterious to be of help in my investigation of *Montaillou* and a conception of history as a matter of possibilities. Their conception of the historical conditions forming the ‘successive’ progression of history, as with Durkheim’s Kant-inspired sociology, is ‘transcendental’ and therefore too much above our heads to furnish detailed interpretations of *Montaillou*. On the other hand, Weber’s more this-worldly treatment of ‘objective possibilities’ (and the other elements in his interpretative apparatus) turned them into mere instruments.

Marx’s overall post-Hegelian vision of the politics and dynamics of history does nothing further, directly, to enhance our vision of possibilities in history beyond their standard transcendental, counterfactual, or instrumental use. Perhaps a work of overinterpretation could marshal him into my ranks, but for present purposes I have not seen any point in doing so.<sup>489</sup> However, his description of the expansion of village-communities in the *Grundrisse* might suggest to us, in concluding, that what Adso failed to see and what, perhaps, Brother William could discriminate – and yet what answers William’s question about sides and wholes by rejecting the terms – is that what precedes the visible abbey, or a village like Montaillou, is a form of *property* and a way of dominating the land and its resources. The visible material never (as Marx would insist) constitutes a natural boundary, and it must be built and developed on plots marked-out by successive people in the course of their limited times. Numa does this

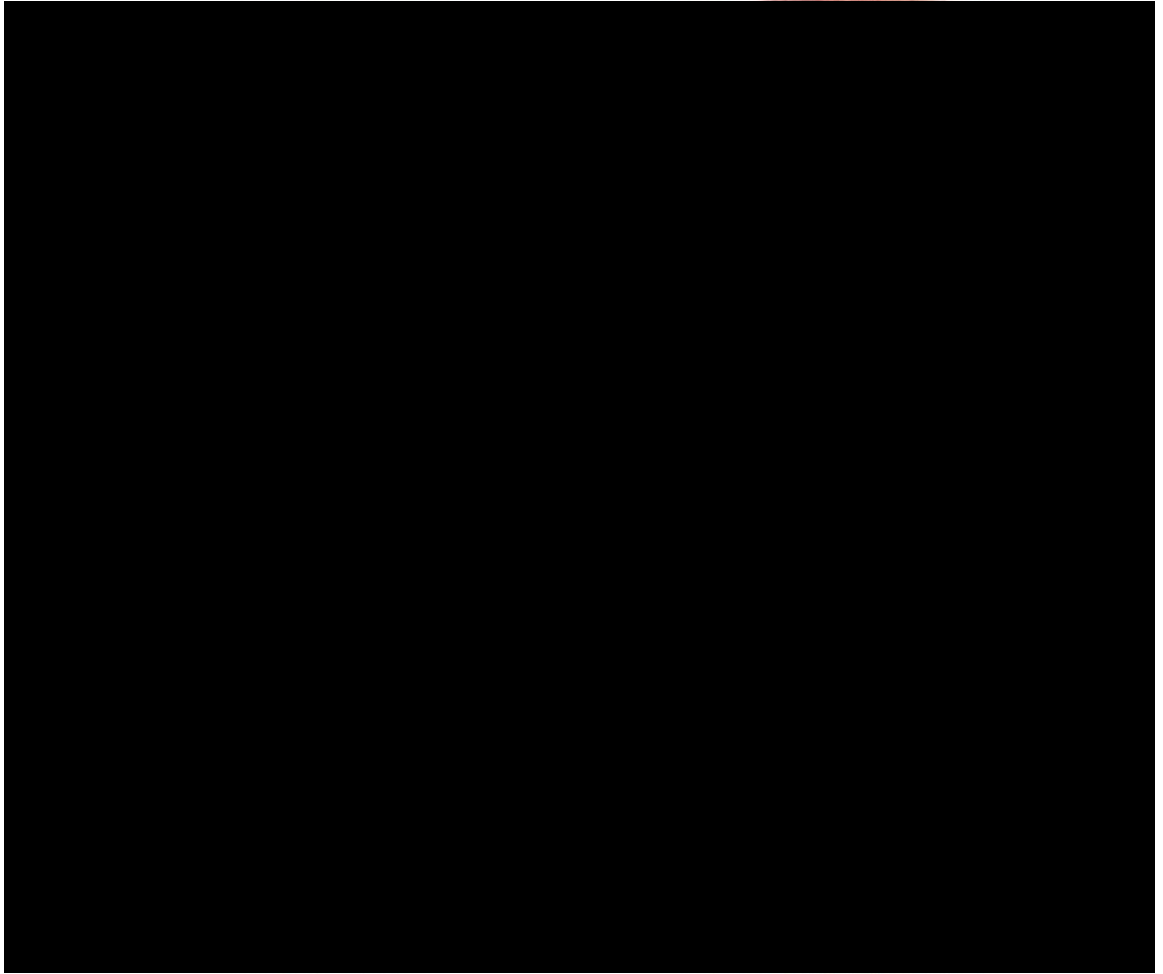
---

<sup>489</sup> As with concepts of *historical distance* and *networks*, Marx’s ubiquitous references to *preconditions* and especially *modes* (i.e. of production), as well as his more generally connecting past, present, and future in *dialectics*, may – now – seem pregnant with possibilities, but interpreting them in my terms would only be to stamp them with my more general theory, to little purpose; see Marx 1964 and 1994.

with boundary stones marking the limits of a community. They are primitive signs designed to give the temporary existence of the community an aura of the divine and lasting. From within them spring the god Terminus. But the existence of what they signify depends on the continuing activity of the people who “own” it, and to judge the history of property at any one of its moments is to judge what, plausibly, these people *might* end up doing next.

The picture I have offered here, of *Montaillou* and more generally, is that these states of affairs are what is interesting in history, and that this determines our vision of action and what explains the contribution of sociological concepts. The elements of *Montaillou* come together in a unity in diversity mediated through the possibilities they introduce. However, it is important that the possibilities which constitute these states of affairs can never be delimited in a fully secure and final way. There is only a whole in so far as there are sides. There is nothing more substantial within or above to rely upon – no firmament, no ‘divine order’, as we saw Ranke put it. Numa’s boundary stones, and not the divine geometry which excited Adso, are the best metaphor for the contexts of possibility represented in history. Unlike the walls of the abbey, they offer only a subtle, uncertain resistance to the visitor. As the now late Geoffrey Hawthorn put it, as we know more about the history of human societies, so we know less about where the limits lie and have lain. Yet perhaps in one’s final line it pays to retain a little faith in the god Terminus.





## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Original publication dates have been indicated where they seem especially significant. Mostly this means classic texts which have been reprinted a century or more later in modern editions; but the focus on Montaignou means that original contemporaneity to 1975 has also sometimes been considered a significant point of interest.*

\*

Abbot, Andrew (2001). *Time Matters: On Theory and Method*. Chicago University Press: Chicago.

Alexandrova, Anna (2009). 'When Analytic Narratives Explain'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 3: 1-24.

Anderson, Benedict (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso: London.

Ankersmit, Frank (1983). *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*. Kluwer: Leiden.

Ankersmit, Frank (1998). *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Ankersmit, Frank (2002). *Historical Representation*. Stanford University Press: Stanford.

Ankersmit, Frank (2005), 'Reply to Professor Saari', *Rethinking History* 9 (1): 23-33.

Ankersmit, Frank (2012). *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca.

Ankersmit, Frank (2013), 'History as the Science of the Individual'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 7 (3): 396-425.

Ankersmit, Frank (2014), 'Representationalist Logic' in Admir Skodo (ed.), *Other Logics: Alternatives to Formal Logic in the History of Thought and Contemporary Philosophy*. Brill: Leiden: 128-150.

Ankersmit, Frank and Tamm, Marek (2016), 'Leibnizian philosophy of history: a conversation'. *Rethinking History* 20 (4): 491-511.

Antognazza, Maria Rosa (2009). *Leibniz: An Intellectual Biography*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Antoni, Carlo (1962 [1940]). *From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking*. Translation by Hayden White. Merlin: London.

Aristotle (1998). *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Translation by David Ross, JL Ackrill, and JO Urmson. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Arnold, John H (2008). *What is Medieval History?* Polity: Cambridge.

Auerbach, Erich (2003 [1953]). *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translation by Willard Task. Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Austen, Jane (2015 [1813]). *Pride and Prejudice*. Scholastic: London.

Bataille, Georges (1991). *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*. Translation by Richard Robinson. Amok Books: Los Angeles, California.

Bellosi, Luciano (1999). *Duccio: The Maestà*. Translation by Elizabeth Currie. Thames and Hudson: New York.

Ben-Menahem, Yemima (1997), 'Historical Contingency', *Ratio* 10 (2): 99-107.

Ben-Menahem, Yemima (2016), 'If Counterfactuals Were Excluded From Historical Reasoning...'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 370-381.

Bennett, Alan (2005). *Untold Stories*. Faber & Faber: London.

Bennett, Alan (screenplay) (2006). *The History Boys*. Fox-Searchlight Films/DNA Films/BBC 2 Films/ UK Film Council in association with the National Theatre (UK).

Bergman, Ingmar (dir.) (1957). *The Seventh Seal / Det sjunde inseglet*. Tarten Video.

Berlin, Isaiah (1953). *Historical Inevitability*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Bloch, Marc (1939). *La société féodale. La formation des liens de dépendance*. Michel Albin: Paris.

Bloch, Marc (1940). *La société féodale. Les classes et les gouvernement des hommes*. Michel Albin: Paris.

Boyd, Robert and Richerson, Peter (2005). 'How Microevolutionary Processes Give Rise to History' in *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures*. Oxford University Press: Oxford: 287-309.

Braudel, Fernand (1995), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Time of Phillip II*. Volume 1. Translation by Sian Reynolds. University of California Press : Berkeley.

Brenon, Anne (2005). *Les femmes cathares*. Perrin: Paris.

Brown, Peter (1995). *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Brown, Gregory & Chiek, Yual (eds.) (2016). *Leibniz on Compossibility and Possible Worlds*. Springer: Basel.

Burgière, André (2009). *The Annales School: An intellectual history*. Translation by Jean Marie Todd. Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London.

Burke, Peter (1990). *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929 – 1989*. Polity: Cambridge.

Carli, Enzo (1998). *Duccio á Siena*. Instituto Geografico DeAgostini: Novara.

Carr, E. H. (1990). *What Is History?* Penguin: London.

Carrard, Phillipe (1992). *Poetics of the New History: French historical discourse from Braudel to Chartier*. Johns Hopkins University Press: London and Baltimore.

Coleman, Michael C (2009), 'Response to a postmodernist: Or, a historian's critique of postmodernist critiques of history' in *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice*. Routledge: London and New York: 119-132.

Collins, Randall (2004). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.

Conrad, Joseph (1926 [1906]). *The Mirror of the Sea*. Methuen and Company: London.

Cover, J.A. and Hawthorne, John (2000), 'Leibnizian Modality Again: Reply to Murray', *The Leibniz Review* 10: 87-101.

Clark, Andy (2015). *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

- Clark, Chris (2013). *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to war in 1914*. Harper: New York.
- Von Clausewitz, Carl (1997 [1832]). *On War*. Translation by JJ Grahame and FN Maude. Wordsworth Editions: Hertfordshire.
- Crane, Tim (2017), 'Leibniz and the problem of consciousness' in Stephen Leach and James Tartaglia (eds.), *Consciousness and the Great Philosophers*. Routledge: London: 89-95.
- Dale, Eric (2014). *Hegel, the End of History, and the Future*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Dancy, Jonathan (2004). *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Danto, Arthur (1962), 'Narrative Sentences', *History & Theory* 2 (2): 146-179.
- Danto, Arthur (1986). *Narration and Knowledge*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Davies, Norman (1997). *Europe: a history*. Pimlico: London.
- Demeulenaere, Pierre (ed.) (2011). *Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Dickens, Charles (1998 [1854]). *Hard Times*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Dietzgen, Joseph (1873), 'Scientific Socialism':  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/dietzgen/works/1870s/scientific-socialism.htm>:  
 accessed 05.04.2017.
- di Risi, Vincenzo (2007). *Geometry and Monadology: Leibniz' Analysis Situs and Philosophy of Space*. Birkhäuser: Berlin.
- Doyen, Solonge (2000), 'Du dissentiment religieux au dissentiment politique: cathares, protestants, jansénistes' in Jacques Julliard (ed.), *Histoire de la France: Les conflits*. Volume 5. Éditions du Seuil: Paris: 113-226.
- Dummet, Michael (1969), 'The Reality of the Past'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69 (1): 239-258.
- Dummet, Michael (2004). *Truth and the Past*. Columbia University Press: New York.

- Durkheim, Émile (1994 [1912]). *Les formes élémentaire de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie*. PUF: Paris.
- Eco, Umberto (1984 [1980]). *The Name of the Rose*. Translation by William Weaver. Picador: London.
- Evans, Richard J (2016), 'Response'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 457-467.
- Evans, Richard J (2014). *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*. Little Brown: London.
- Fairbrother, Daniel (2017), 'Leibniz and the Philosophical Criticism of Historiography'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 11 (1): 1-24.
- Van Fraassen, Bas (1980). *The Scientific Image*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Froeyman, Anton (2016). *History, Ethics, and the Recognition of the Other: A Levinasian View on the Writing of History*. Routledge: London.
- Ferguson, Niall (2011). *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*. Penguin: London.
- Fustel de Coulanges, Numa Denis 1963 [1864]. *La cité antique*. Hachette: Paris.
- Garber, Daniel (1985), 'Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: the Middle Years' in Kathleen Okrulik and James Brown (eds.), *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz*. Reidel: Dordrecht: 27-130.
- Garber, Daniel (2009). *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Garip, Feliz (2017). *On The Move: Changing Mechanisms of Mexico-US Migration*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Geach, Peter (1981). *Logic Matters*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Gellner, Ernest (1973). *Cause and meaning in the social sciences*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.
- Gellner, Ernest (1971), 'Our Current Sense of History'. *European Journal of Sociology* XII: 159-179.

- Geertz, Clifford (1993 [1973]). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Fontana: London.
- Geuss, Raymond (2005). *Outside Ethics*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford.
- Giddens, Anthony (1971), 'The 'Individual' in the Writings of Émile Durkheim'. *European Journal of Sociology* 12 (2): 210-228.
- Ginzberg, Carlo (1980). *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.
- Goldstone, Jack (1991). *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. University of California Press: Los Angeles.
- Griffe, Élie (1969). *Les débuts de l'aventure cathare en Languedoc, 1140-1190*. Letouzey et Ané: Paris.
- Griffe, Élie (1971). *Le Languedoc Cathare de 1190 à 1210*. Letouzey et Ané: Paris.
- Halbwachs, Maurice (1906). *Leibniz*. Éditions Méllottée: Paris.
- Hallam, Elizabeth M and Everard, Judith (eds.) (2001). *Capetian France, 987-1328*. Longman: New York.
- Hawthorn, Geoffrey (1991). *Plausible worlds: Possibility and understanding in history and the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (2010 [1812-1833]). *Science of Logic*. Translation by George Di Giovanni. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1991 [1821]). *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Translation by HB Nisbet. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (2008 [1831]). *Lectures on Logic, Berlin 1831*. Transcription by Karl Hegel. Translation by Clark Butler. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1975 [1835]). *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Volume II. Translation by TM Knox. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Heidelberger, Michael (2001), 'Origins of the logical theory of probability: Von Kries, Wittgenstein, Waissman'. *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 15 (2): 177-188.

- Hobsbawm, Eric (1977 [1962]). *The Age of Revolution, 1789 – 1848*. Abacus: London.
- Inkpen, Rob and Turner, Derek (2013), ‘The Topography of Historical Contingency’. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6 (1): 1-19.
- Jay, Martin (1984). *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Jenkins, Keith (2003). *Re-Thinking History*. Routledge: Oxford and New York.
- Kalyvas, Stathis (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Kant, Immanuel (1998 [1781]). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translation by Paul Guyer. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Kaufman, Stuart (2000). *Investigations*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Kierkegaard, Søren (2009 [1843]). *Repetition* in Edward F Mooney (ed.), *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*. Translation by MG Piety. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 8-96.
- The King James Bible* (1865). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Kuukkanen, Jouni-Matti (2015). *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*. Palgrave: London.
- Kuukkanen, Jouni-Matti (2015b), ‘Why we need to move from truth-functionality to performativity in historiography’. *History and Theory* 54 (2): 226-243.
- Lambert, Michael (1998). *The Cathars*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Lebow, Richard Ned (2009), ‘Counterfactuals, History, and Fiction’. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 128 (2): 57-73.
- Leff, Gordon (1967). *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c.1250-1450*. Volume II. Manchester University Press: Manchester.
- Le Goff, Jacques (1993). *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*. Translation by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Leibniz, G. W. (1995), *Correspondence with Arnauld* [Selections, 1686–7], in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*. Translation by Mary Morris & G. H. R. Parkinson. Everyman: London: 48–74.



- Leibniz, G. W. (1989). *Philosophical Essays*. Translation and edition by Roger Ariew & Daniel Garber. Hackett: Indianapolis.
- Leibniz, G. W. (1991 [1714]). *Monadology*. Nicholas Rescher (ed.), *G.W. Leibniz' Monadology: An Edition for Students*. Routledge: London.
- LeRoy Ladurie, Emmanuel (1975). *Montaillou, un village occitan de 1294 à 1324*. Gallimard: Paris.
- LeRoy Ladurie, Emmanuel (1979). *Le Carnaval de Romans: De la Chandeleur au mercredi des Cendres, 1579-1580*. Gallimard: Paris.
- LeRoy Ladurie, Emmanuel (1997). *The Beggar and the Professor: A Sixteenth Century Family Saga*. Translation by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago University Press: Chicago.
- LeRoy Ladurie, Emmanuel, Brenon, Anne and Dieulafait, Christiane, et al (2001). *Autour de Montaillou: Un Village Occitan*. L'Hydre Éditions: Luxembourg.
- Lloyd, Christopher (1993). *The Structures of History*. Blackwell: Oxford and Cambridge, MA.
- Lloyd, Geoffrey (2017), 'Foresight in Ancient Civilizations' in Lawrence W Sherman and David Allan Feller (eds.), *Foresight*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 10-31.
- Lombard, Lawrence (1986). *Events: A Metaphysical Study*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.
- Lukes, Stephen (1975), 'Political Ritual and Social Integration'. *Sociology* 9 (2): 289-308.
- Lukes, Stephen (1980), 'Elster on counterfactuals'. *Inquiry* 23 (2): 145-155
- Lynch, Kevin (2017), 'The divisibility of basic actions'. *Analysis* 77 (2): 312-318.
- Maar, Alexander (2016), 'Applying D. K. Lewis' Counterfactual Theory of Causation to the Philosophy of Historiography'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 349-369.
- Maine, Henry Sumner (1913 [1861]). *Ancient Law*. Dutton: London.
- Malcom, Noel (2015). *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World*. Penguin: London.
- Malcom, Noel (2002). *Bosnia: A Short History*. Pan: London.

- Mann, Michael (2012). *The Sources of Social Power: From the Beginning to AD 1760*. Volume I. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Mann, Thomas (1999 [1924]). *The Magic Mountain*. Translation by H. T. Lowe-Porter. Vintage: London.
- Mantel, Hilary (2010). *Wolf Hall*. Fourth Estate: London.
- Markl, Karl Peter (1980). 'Truth-finding in society and sociology'. *Inquiry* 23 (2): 173-185
- Marx, Karl (1964). *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*. Translation by Jack Cohen. Lawrence and Wishart: London.
- Marx, Karl (1994). *Selected Writings*. Edited by Lawrence H Simon. Hackett: Indianapolis.
- McDowell, John (1979), 'Virtue and Reason', *The Monist* 62 (3): 331-350.
- McDowell, John (1998), 'On "The Reality of the Past" in *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA and London.
- McGhee, George (2007). *The Geometry of Evolution: Adaptive Landscapes and Theoretical Morphospaces*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1964). *L'Œil et l'Esprit*. Gallimard: Paris.
- Meyn, SP and Tweedie, RL (1993). *Markov Chains and Stochastic Stability*. Springer-Verlag: Berlin.
- Mill, John Stewart (1919 [1843]). *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Longmans, Green and Co.: London.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo (2016), 'The Rules of the Game in the Study of Ancient History'. Translation by Kenneth W Yu. *History and Theory* 55 (1): 39-45.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo (1975). *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Moore, Omar (1980). *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds* by Jon Elster. *Contemporary Sociology* 9 (1): 92-3
- Morris, Ian & Scheidel, Walter (eds.). *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Mount, Ferdinand (1978). 'Montaillou revisited'. *The Spectator*, 30<sup>th</sup> December: 37-8

- Nelli, René (1969). *La vie quotidienne des Cathares du Languedoc au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Hachette: Paris.
- Nelli, René (1978). *La philosophie du Catharisme: Le dualisme radicale au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Payot: Paris.
- Nichols, Stephen G (2009), 'Contingency and Post-Figural Historiography in the French Restoration, 1815-1830'. *MLN* 124 (4): 777-796.
- Nita, Adrian (2012), 'Time as a Condition of Possibility', *The Leibniz Review* 22: 217-220.
- Nolan, Daniel (2016), 'The Possibilities of History'. *The Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 441-456.
- Nósal, Martin (2015), 'The Gadamerian approach to the relation between experience and language'. *History and Theory* 54 (2): 195-208.
- Ollman, Bertrell (2003), 'Studying history backward: A neglected feature of Marx's materialist conception of history' in *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago: 115-126.
- Ollman, Bertrell (2003b), 'The Philosophy of Internal Relations' in *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago: 36-50.
- O'Neill, John (ed.) (1973). *Modes of individualism and collectivism*. Heinemann: London.
- Panofsky, Erwin (1972 [1939]). *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. Harper and Row: London and New York.
- Parsons, Talcott (1977). *The Evolution of Societies*. Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.
- Paterson, Linda M (1993). *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan society, c.1100-c.1300*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Paul, Herman (2008), 'A Weberian medievalist: Hayden White in the 1950s', *Rethinking History* 12 (1): 75-102.
- Phillips, Mark Salber (2013). *On Historical Distance*. Yale University Press: New Haven.
- Phillipson, Nicholas (2011). *Hume: The Philosopher as Historian*. Penguin: London.

- Preston, Paul (2012). *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*. Harper: London.
- Price, Michael (2016), 'Naming the concept *horse*'. *Philosophical Studies* 173 (10): 2727-2743.
- Quine, WVO (1951), 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'. *Philosophical Review* 60 (1): 20-43.
- Rackham, Oliver (1995). *The History of the Countryside*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson: London.
- Radcliffe-Brown, AR (1952). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses*. Free Press: Glencoe, Illinois.
- Ramsey, Frank (1990 [1929], 'Probability and Partial Belief' in DH Mellor (ed.), *Frank Ramsey: Philosophical Papers*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 95-6.
- Von Ranke, Leopold (2011). *The Theory and Practice of History*. Edited by George C Iggers (multiple translators). Routledge: Oxford and New York.
- Von Ranke, Leopold (1884). *Universal History: The Oldest Historical Group of Nations and the Greeks*. Translation by GW Prothero. Charles Scribner's Sons: New York.
- Redfield, Robert (1960). *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.
- Rescher, Nicholas (2003). *Imagining Irreality: A Study of Unreal Possibilities*. Open Court: Chicago and La Salle.
- Ricoeur, Paul (1983). *Temps et récit: L'Intrigue at le récit historique*. Seuil: Paris.
- Ricoeur, Paul (2004). *History, Memory, Forgetting*. Translation by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago University Press: Chicago.
- Ridley, Aaron (2009), 'Nietzsche's Intentions: What The Sovereign Individual Promises' in Ken Gemes and Simon May (eds.), *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*. Oxford University Press: Oxford: 181-196.
- Ringer, Fritz (2003). *Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography*. Chicago University Press: Chicago.

- Rochberg, Francesca (2017), 'Foresight in Ancient Mesopotamia' in Lawrence W Sherman and David Allan Feller (eds.), *Foresight*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 157-175.
- Roper, Lyndal (2006). *Witch Craze: Women and Evil in Baroque Germany*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London.
- Rosaldo, Renato (1986), 'From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor' in James Clifford and George E Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. University of California Press: Berkeley: 77-97.
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel D (2016), 'The Ways We Wonder 'What If'. *The Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 382-411.
- Ruben, David-Hillel (2003). *Action and its Explanation*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Ruben, David-Hillel (1985). *The Metaphysics of the Social World*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.
- Runciman, WG (1966). *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Inequality in Twentieth-Century England*. Routledge & Kegan-Paul. London.
- Runciman, WG (2015). *Very Different But Much The Same: The Evolution of English Society Since 1714*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Saari, Heikki (2005), 'On Frank Ankersmit's Postmodern Theory of Historical Narrativity', *Rethinking History* 9 (1): 5-21.
- Sandis, Constantine (ed.) (2009). *New Essays on the Explanation of Action*. Palgrave: London.
- Savage, Mike (2015). *Social Class in the Twenty-First Century*. Pelican: London.
- Scheidel, Walter (2009). 'Sex and Empire: A Darwinian Perspective' in Ian Morris & Walter Scheidel (eds.) *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium*. Oxford University Press: Oxford: 255-324
- Scheidel, Walter (2014). 'Evolutionary psychology and the historian'. *American Historical Review* 119 (5): 1563-1575
- Schiel, Juliane (2009), 'Crossing Paths between East and West: The Use of Counterfactual Thinking for the Concept of "Entangled Histories"'. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 128 (2): 161-183.

- Schmid, Georg (2009), 'Counterfactuals and Future Histories: Retrospective Imagining as an Auxiliary for the Scenarios of Expectance'. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 128 (2): 74-87.
- Sen, Amartya (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Sherman, Lawrence W and Feller, David Allan (2017). *Foresight*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Schmitt, Carl (2007). *The Concept of the Political*. Expanded edition; Translation by J Harvey Lomax. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Schütz, Alfred (1967 [1932]). *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Translation by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert. Northwestern University Press: Illinois.
- Schütz, Alfred (2013 [1927-1932]). 'Objects and Methods of the Social Sciences' in Michael Barber (ed.), *Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers VI: Literary Reality and Relationships*. Springer: Dordrecht: 197-198.
- Schütz, Alfred (2013 [1936-7]). 'The Problem of Personality in the Social World' in Michael Barber (ed.), *Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers VI: Literary Reality and Relationships*. Springer: Dordrecht: 199-240.
- Sen, Amartya (2007). *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. WW Norton: New York.
- Sévilla, Jean (2006). *Historiquement correct*. Perrin: Paris.
- Siedentop, Larry (2014). *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Individualism*. Allen Lane: London.
- Silverstein, Harry S. (1980), 'The Evil of Death'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (7): 401-424.
- Skinner, Quentin (1996). *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Skinner, Quentin (2002). *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*. Volume I. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Skinner, Quentin (2002b). *Visions of Politics: Hobbes and Civil Science*. Volume III. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Skinner, Quentin (2014). *Forensic Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

- Solomon, Robert C (1976), 'Is There Happiness After Death?'. *Philosophy* 51 (no. 196): 189-193.
- Stenton, Frank (1971 [1943]). *Anglo-Saxon England*. Third Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur (1978). *Theoretical Methods in Social History*. Academic Press: London.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur (1980). 'Is the Prisoner's Dilemma all of sociology?' *Inquiry*: 23 (2): 187-192.
- Stone, Brian (trans.) (1959). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Penguin: London.
- Stone, Lawrence and Fawtier Stone, Jane C (1986). *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Sunstein, Cass R (2016), 'Historical Explanations Always Involve Counterfactual History'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 433-440.
- Taylor, AJP (1967). *Europe: Grandeur and Decline*. Penguin: London.
- Taylor, Charles (1980). 'Formal theory in social science' *Inquiry*. 23 (2): 139-144
- Talbot, Anne (2009), 'Chance and Necessity in History: EH Carr and Leon Trotsky Compared'. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 128 (2): 88-96.
- Tarde, Gabriel (1999 [1893]). *Mondaologie et sociologie*. PUF: Paris.
- Thompson, EP (1980). *The Making of the English Working Class*. Penguin: London.
- Tucker, Aviezer (2016), 'Historiographic Counterfactuals and the Philosophy of Historiography'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 333-348.
- Turner, Stephen P (1983), 'Weber on Action'. *American Sociological Review* 48 (4): 506-519.
- Turner, Stephen P and Factor, Regis A (1981), 'Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Weber's Methodological Writings'. *Sociological Review* 29 (1): 5-29.
- Vauchez, André (2012). *Francis of Assisi: The life and afterlife of a medieval saint*. Translation by Michael F Cusato. Yale University Press: New Haven and London.
- Vetter, Barbara (2015). *Potentiality: From Dispositions to Modality*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

- Wachsmann, Nikolaus (2015). *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*. Little Brown: London.
- Walsh, William H (1974), 'Colligatory Concepts in History' in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History*. Oxford University Press: Oxford: 127-144.
- Weber, Max (2013 [1922]). *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretative sociology*. Volume 1. Edited by Gunther Roth and Claus Wittich. University of California Press: California.
- Weber, Max (2012). *Collected Methodological Writings*. Translation by Hans Henrik Bruun. Routledge: London.
- Weber, Max (2002 [1905]). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translation by Peter Baehr and Gordon C Wells. Penguin: London.
- Weinryb, Elazar (1978), 'Descriptions of Actions and Their Place in History' in Yirmiah Yovel (ed.), *Philosophy of History and Action*. D. Reidel: Dordrecht, Boston, and London: 97-111.
- Weis, René (2016). *Les derniers cathares, 1290-1329*. Translation by Béatrice Bonne. Tallandier: Paris.
- Weis, René (2000). *The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars, 1290-1329*. Penguin: London.
- White, Hayden (1978). *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London.
- White, Hayden (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London.
- Whitehouse, Harvey (2004). *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*. AltaMira: Walnut Creek, CA.
- Wickham, Chris (2005). *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Williams, Bernard (2014a). *Essays and Reviews, 1959-2002*. Edited by Michael Wood. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Williams, Bernard (2014b). *Logic and Society: Possibilities and Contradictions and Ulysses and the Sirens* by Jon Elster. Reprinted in Bernard Williams (2014a), *Essays*



*and Reviews, 1959-2002*. Edited by Michael Wood. Princeton University Press: Princeton: 165-198.

Williams, Bernard (2014c). *Immanuel Kant* by Lucien Goldmann. Reprinted in Bernard Williams (2014a), *Essays and Reviews, 1959-2002*. Edited by Michael Wood. Princeton University Press: Princeton: 77-82.

Williams, Bernard (2002). *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.

Wilson, Thomas P (1982). 'Social Theory and Modern Logic: Reflections on Elster's *Logic and Society*'. *Acta Sociologica*. 25 (4): 431-441

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1980). *Culture and Value / Vermischte Bemerkungen*. Parallel English/German text. English translation by Peter Winch. Blackwell: Oxford.

Woolf, Daniel (2016), 'Concerning *Altered Pasts*: Reflections of an Early Modern Historian'. *The Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10 (3): 413-432.

Yahil, Edna Ruth (2002), 'Revisiting *Montaillou*'. *Comitatus* 33: 149-165.

Zhang, Xupeng (2015), 'In and Out of the West: On the Past, Present, and Future of Chinese Historical Theory'. *History and Theory* 54 (4): 46-63.